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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

ADDRESSING THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE THROUGH
CRITICAL SELF REFLECTION: A SELF-STUDY OF COURAGEOUS
AND TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

PROGRAM IN ADMINISTRATION AND SUPERVISION

BY

ERNEST D. WILLIAMS

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2019

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I contemplate my journey, I am reminded of the African proverb “Ubuntu ngumtu ngabanye abantu,” which means, “I am because we are.” I am who I am because of my faith in God! My faith has led me to become an educator and to fight for social justice and equity for all children. I am who I am because of my ancestors (Du Bois, Bethune, King, and Wells) and my deceased family members (Earnest, Romunda, Virginia, James Jr., Sara, Davion, Leroy, Judy, and Genora), who paved the way for me by demonstrating resilience, persistence, and courage, despite life’s obstacles. Many of my ancestors’ names are yet unknown; I am proud to be a part of their legacy.

I am who I am because of my family and friends, who unconditionally love and support me. To my immediate family (Rylander, Lynette, Alvie, Annie, Michelle, Rhonda, James, and Airianna) and my extended family (the Williams, Boiling, Smith, Jackson, Cowling, and Bracey families), I love and appreciate each one of you! To my friends (Isaac, Tai, Teaunto, Romerie, Jermaine, Jonathan, Clayton, Nick, Donte, Gemayle, Aaron, and Malaika), you have shown me that family is not limited to biology.

I am who I am because of my community, church, and fraternity. To my church family, Trinity United Church of Christ, along with my pastor emeritus and senior pastor, you have taught me what it means to serve God and my community! To my fraternity, the “oldest and the coldest” men of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., the Iota Delta Lambda Chapter, my fraternal ships (Brandin, TJ, Felix, Al, Jeff, and Robert), Dean (Marcus), and

the “Untouchables,” our family trees may not be the same, but I proudly call these men my brothers.

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To all of my family, extended family, and friends, words cannot express my gratitude. You are the reason I have achieved this milestone.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research study to my nephews Gelyn, Geordan, and Jeremiah.

May this be a reminder that with faith, determination, grit, resilience, and courage you can conquer anything!

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ABSTRACT

Research reveals that zero-tolerance policies lead to school suspensions of a disproportionate number of African American students in urban areas (Center for Civil [CCRR], 2015). Suspensions increase student failure rates and dropout likelihood and reduce the ability to graduate on time (Skiba, Arrendondo, & Williams, 2014). Studies have also shown that African American students are suspended three times more than their White American peers and two times more than their Latino American peers (CCRR, 2015). This has impelled federal and local government agencies, community organizations, and educators to question the effectiveness of punitive discipline policies that have marginalized black and brown students (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; CCRR, 2015). This self-study's purpose was to discover my role and impact as a superintendent while addressing punitive discipline practices. At Johnson School (pseudonym), out-of-school suspension is the primary consequence of student infractions, resulting in 43% of students suspended at least once during the 2015-2016 year and a suspension rate 500% greater than that of Indiana (Indiana Department, 2017a). I addressed the punitive discipline issues at Johnson School by changing school policies, analyzing discipline data, providing professional development, and modeling restorative practices. By addressing the exclusionary discipline issues, I emerged as a courageous and transformative leader. Courageous and transformative leadership are essential characteristics required to tackle the concerns of equity and justice in public education.

These research findings were used to create the Framework for Courageous and Transformative Educational Leaders (CTEL), which supports district and school leaders in addressing issues of equity and justice.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

During the 2011-2012 school year, three and a half million public school students were suspended at least once in the United States (Center for Civil [CCRR], 2015). Of these suspensions, high school students were suspended three to four times more than elementary school students (CCRR, 2015). National suspension rates are alarming because out-of-school suspensions increase student failure rates and dropout likelihood and reduce the ability to graduate from high school on time (Skiba, Arredono, & Williams, 2014). McFarland, Stark, and Cui (2016) cite that high school dropouts “make up disproportionately higher percentages of the nation’s institutionalized population” (p. 1). Furthermore, McFarland et al. reported that “the 2013 status dropout rates for Asian (3.2 percent) and White (5.1 percent) 16- to 24-year-olds were lower than those of their African American (7.3 percent) and Hispanic (11.7 percent) peers” (p. 16).

A more in-depth analysis of national suspension data from the 2011-2012 school year reveals that African American students were suspended three times more often than their White American peers and two times more often than their Latino American peers (CCRR, 2015). Furthermore, a high school student who has a disability and who is an African American male is at a higher risk of being suspended (CCRR, 2015). This alarming data has caused federal and local government agencies, community

organizations, and educators to question the effectiveness of discipline structures, policies, and procedures in American schools (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; CCRR, 2015).

In the district where I am a superintendent, the primary method of school discipline is the utilization of out-of-school suspensions. One accountability metric, per the district's contractual agreement with the state, is to reduce out-of-school suspensions by 10% each year. At the end of the 2016-2017 school year, the district received notice from that state that we were in violation of a state performance indicator for suspending special education students at a higher rate than the state average. As the superintendent, I am accountable for ensuring that the district remains compliant with federal and state regulations. The primary objective of this self-study is to determine my role in leading efforts to move the district from more punitive, zero-tolerance measures to a restorative, intervention-based approach to discipline.

Zero-tolerance policies were created in the 1990s to combat gun violence in schools and can be considered an attribute of the high rates of suspensions and expulsions (Brady, 2002). During this time, President Bill Clinton signed the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994. This federal mandate required school districts to expel students for a minimum of one year for possessing firearms on school property. Many school districts applied zero-tolerance guidelines to school discipline policies for offenses that went beyond the original intentions and scope of the Gun-Free Schools Act (Brady, 2002). For example, the Decatur Public School Board of Education suspended and expelled several students for a fight that erupted during a football game. This fight did not involve any weapons but was described by school officials as gang activity (Brady, 2002). Policies, procedures,

and systems that focus on punishing the behaviors of students, rather than using interventions not only have the potential to increase the dropout rate of students but also create issues of social justice and inequality (Cramer, Gonzales, & Pellegrini-Lafont, 2014).

Suspending and expelling black and brown students at high rates is referred to as “school- to-prison pipeline” (Skiba et al., 2014). Skiba et al. write:

The school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) is a construct used to describe policies and practices, especially concerning school discipline, in the public schools and juvenile justice system that decrease the probability of school success for children and youth, and increase the likelihood of adverse life outcomes. (p. 462)

The Voices of Youth in Chicago Education (VOYCE; 2011) organization reports that zero-tolerance policies do not make schools safer or increase academic achievement. Instead, a high correlation between zero-tolerance policies and student dropout rates has been found.

In response to the zero-tolerance policies that sparked an increase in the number of suspensions and expulsions for African and Latino American students, the U.S. Department of Justice and Department of Education issued a statement on January 8, 2014, not only to address the disparity but also to guide state and local school boards (CCRR, 2015). According to the Center for Civil Rights Remedies (2015):

The clear message in the letter of guidance the U.S. Department of Justice and Department of Education sent to the leaders of our nation's public schools is that they must examine the data and their discipline policies and practices, and take

immediate steps to close the discipline gap where unjustifiable disparities are found. While this legal and moral obligation to eliminate racial disparities is not new, this specific guidance is the first joint effort to call on school leaders to take immediate action. This heightens the relevance of the question, “Are we closing the discipline gap?” (p. 3)

This communication from the federal government clarified to state and local school boards that zero-tolerance policies were resulting in racial disparities. Moreover, the transmission placed accountability on the school boards to examine the data and to take action. According to Anderson and Ritter (2017), state boards of education and local school districts have responded to the alarming data by making changes in policies and procedures, both before and after guidance was issued from the federal government. For instance, in 2014, Chicago Public Schools revised its student code of conduct to incorporate restorative justice practices (Chicago Board, 2015). In 2014, the state of California placed limits on suspensions, and in 2015-2016, the Miami-Dade school district eliminated out-of-school suspensions as a disciplinary consequence (Anderson & Ritter, 2017). Consequentially, if suspensions continue to be a problem, as the literature suggests, urban schools will not be able to guarantee that each student will graduate with competency and preparedness for college and careers (CCRR, 2015).

Background of the Study

This research will analyze a school district that serves students in grades 7-12. The district has one school, Johnson School (pseudonym), which is located in an urban Midwestern city, Rogers City (pseudonym), where the median household income is

\$28,020, and 37% of residents live in poverty (United States Census, 2016). Johnson, currently an independent contract school within the state of Indiana, has approximately 600 students, 50 teachers, and 30 support staff and administrators. Of the students, 95% are African American, and 93% qualify for free and reduced-price lunch (Indiana Department, 2018b). Johnson is located in a school choice state, where students can apply for state scholarships to subsidize tuition at private schools (Indiana Department, 2017c). Due to Johnson's attendance boundaries extending to the city limits of Rogers City, the majority of students use the transportation services provided by Rogers School District to travel home and to school.

The typical school day for students consists of seven instructional periods. The students' courses (reading, math, science, and social studies) consist of a blend of online and traditional classroom instruction. Electives include career and technical education courses, physical education, Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC), art, and online credit recovery. Various behavioral issues, such as student defiance, occur throughout the day. However, the school security staff and the dean of students intervene without causing significant disruptions to the learning environment. During the instructional periods, students are in their classrooms, and the hallways are quiet.

For the past five years, Adams Corporation (pseudonym) has held a contract with the state to operate Johnson School as an independent school district that reports directly to the state. While Adams Corporation has handled the academic program, the Rogers City School District (RCSD) owns the building and is responsible for building maintenance and student transportation. The relationship between the RCSD and Johnson

School has raised several challenges, including the upkeep and maintenance of facilities. Improper maintenance of the boilers resulted in a lack of heat and hot water during the frigid winter months. This left the school's administration with no choice but to cancel school for nearly two weeks. The RSCD is millions of dollars in debt, and the state has assigned an emergency manager to operate the district, thereby nullifying the authority of the superintendent and the school board. Moving forward, Adams Corporation must collaborate with the RSCD's emergency financial manager to operate the facility.

Rogers City is historically known for its former steel mill operation. However, the closing of the steel mills resulted in significant job losses and declining resources, causing a high poverty rate. An example of the city's current condition is that there are no major hotels within the city limits and only three supermarkets. Having only three supermarkets classifies the city as a food desert. The American Nutrition Association (2017) defines food deserts "as parts of the country void of fresh fruit, vegetables, and other healthful whole foods, usually found in impoverished areas. This is largely due to a lack of grocery stores, farmers' markets, and healthy food providers." Having a high number of residents living below the federal poverty line with limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables indicates the current condition and well-being of the city.

Despite the socioeconomic status of Rogers City, Johnson has a rich legacy and is a staple in the community. In the 1920s, segregation was strong, and African American students were only permitted to attend Johnson (Johnson, 2016). Over the years, Johnson has produced African American graduates who have become performers, lawyers, doctors, athletes, and other professionals. Johnson's alumni base is prevalent and has

historically received several awards and recognition in academics to sports. Given this, the city ultimately wants to regain Johnson as one of its district schools. When Johnson was operated by the RSCD, both academic and safety challenges existed. The academic challenges led the Indiana Department of Education to rate Johnson as a failing school.

The Indiana Department of Education calculates a yearly rating for each of its schools. “Performance,” “growth,” and “multiple measures” are the three performance domains that comprise Johnson's state report card grade (Indiana Department, 2017b). Each domain is worth 20% of the final school report card grade. The percentage of students who pass the state assessment and the percentage of students who are tested account for the points received in the performance domain. Student growth on the state assessment from the previous year to the current school year determines the points for the growth domain. The multiple measures domain includes the graduation rate, graduation rate improvement (an increase from four to five-year graduation rate), and college and career readiness: percentage of graduates completing activities associated with being more prepared for college and careers. The overall performance across all three domains is used to calculate the A-F grade. An A is the highest grade a school can receive, and an F is the lowest grade a school can receive (Indiana Department, 2017b).

From the 2012-2013 to the 2016-2017 school year, Johnson was ranked as an F school. For the first time in over 10 years, Johnson was ranked as a D school in the 2017-2018 school year. The turnaround team of Adams Corporation has created substantial gains in achievement, as listed in Table 1 (Indiana Department, 2018b).

Table 1

Johnson School's Annual Performance

Performance Category	2012/2013	2016/2017	2018/2019
A–F Accountability Grade	F	D	A
Percentage of Students Passing End of Course Assessment Standards	29.7%	73.9%	*
Graduation Rate	41%	45.5%	*
Attendance Rate	74.5%	94%	*
Number of Students Suspended	545	236	*

Note. * - Indicates that the data has not become publicly available at the time of this study was published.

Source: Indiana Department, 2018b.

Due to the significant gains, the state just renewed another five-year contract with Adams Corporation to continue operating Johnson. This new agreement allows for a more substantial partnership with the city's local school board that was not present before. This partnership will require increased collaboration and communication between Johnson, the RSCD emergency manager, and Adams Corporation.

Problem Statement

While the school has dramatically improved its academic performance (see Table 1), a high number of student suspensions persists. The discipline data at the end of the 2016-2017 school year reflected 864 student discipline referrals and 404 out-of-school student suspensions. The average number of monthly office referrals was 96, and the average number of out-of-school suspensions was 96 per month. Compared to the state,

Johnson's suspension rate—the number of students suspended at least one time—was 500% greater (Indiana Department, 2017a).

In the spring of 2017, Johnson received a state special education citation for having a significant discrepancy in the out-of-school suspension/expulsion rate for more than 10 days of students with disabilities when compared to the state's rate (17.78% for Johnson and 0.96% for the state). Additionally, the school has been cited for having a significant discrepancy in the out-of-school suspension/expulsion rate for more than 10 days for African American students with disabilities compared to the state's rate (17.98% for Johnson and 0.96% for the state).

The school's leadership team has developed a disciplinary process that relies heavily upon out-of-school suspensions. However, the school does not have a transparent system of behavioral interventions for students who repeatedly have issues with misconduct or intense social and emotional needs. Despite the decline of Johnson's suspension rate over the past five years, out-of-school suspensions remain problematic at the local and state levels. The issue with suspension impacts Adams Corporation and Johnson School because the Indiana Department of Education now requires that schools across the state, including Johnson, decrease the number of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, particularly for students of color. More importantly, student suspensions have a direct correlation to negative academic achievement and high school dropout rates (Skiba et al., 2014).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this self-study is to determine how I, as the superintendent of Johnson School, will impact out-of-school suspensions, thereby reducing the phenomenon of the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP). Johnson's out-of-school suspension rate is significantly higher than the state's, so lowering suspensions through research-based interventions is a top priority in my first year as the superintendent of Johnson (Indiana Department of Education, 2017a). This study will provide a structure for me to utilize a methodology within the context of my current work setting and allow me to gain insight as I seek to implement solutions to reduce the number of suspensions (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). Since my responsibilities include ensuring that Johnson School meets federal and state requirements, as well as successfully preparing students for college and careers, my focus as an administrator will be to analyze the development of my leadership abilities through self-study by examining successes and challenges as I implement a plan to reduce the number of suspensions. Additionally, as I reflect on this process, it will further help me to understand my role in addressing the factors that lead to suspensions.

As part of this process, I will assess my leadership skills and development by analyzing my reflective journal entries and by reflecting on the school policies and procedures, as well as meeting minutes and agendas. Furthermore, I will review and reflect on all school-level data, which mirrors national data for suspensions, and analyze the current disciplinary structure, in which 43% of the student body was suspended at least once during the 2015-2016 school year (Indiana Department of Education, 2017a).

Using the results of this analysis and research-based practices, I will create, implement, and—upon reflection—modify a plan purposed to decrease the number of out-of-school suspensions at Johnson School.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are as follows:

Primary question:

- What is my role in shifting a school culture from a punitive based discipline structure to using researched based-interventions and restorative approaches to school discipline?

Secondary questions:

- What were my successes?
- What were my challenges and barriers to success?
- In what ways are my mindset and leadership practices impacted as I led change?

The primary question focuses directly on the theoretical framework of this study: Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis's (2016) Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL). This framework will be interwoven throughout the research project. CRSL is the basis for shifting school culture and challenging the beliefs of the faculty and staff to make changes in disciplinary policy. Once the culture has been modified and everyone is provided the opportunity for job-embedded professional development, the school will be able to change and implement systems and structures that will provide a long-term approach to lessening the out-of-school suspension issue. The secondary research

questions will require me to deepen my reflections by analyzing my growth and the effectiveness of my efforts to reduce suspensions by examining my leadership development, successes, and challenges.

Significance of the Study

This research is significant because reducing out-of-school suspensions is key to keeping students in classrooms, engaged, and on-target for education successes, rather than as possible residents of a penal institution (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; CCRR, 2015; McFarland et al., 2016; Skiba et al., 2014). I am a superintendent seeking to implement change. The self-study methodology will promote my critical self-reflection so that I can maximize my impact. Furthermore, the federal government and school boards recognize that zero-tolerance policies have led to a disproportionate number of African American students in urban areas being suspended from school (CCRR, 2015). School boards are beginning to implement changes in policies and practices with the intention of reducing out-of-school suspensions for African American students (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; CCRR, 2015). This analysis uses self-study and action research to discover my role in addressing the punitive disciplinary issues at Johnson School. The implications and findings of this study will provide insight for schools and district leaders who are charged with addressing punitive disciplinary practices.

A method to reduce out-of-school suspensions, as indicated by Cowan (2014), is to focus on challenging beliefs because “unchallenged beliefs in educators can lead to complacency, acceptance of failure, and low teacher expectations for African American and other underserved student populations” (p. 214). Furthermore, schools should focus

on factors that are within their control. Leithwood's (2010) research found that job-embedded professional development was one of the standard characteristics of districts that have been successful in closing the achievement gap. As a superintendent, I will not only challenge the beliefs of educators, but I will also provide school leaders with the necessary professional development to shift the culture of the school and thus decrease the number of out-of-school suspensions. The implications from this study can serve as an example of best practices for other superintendents as they attempt to tackle the complexity of the issue of out-of-school suspensions for African American students. Most importantly, this self-study will assist me in analyzing and then improving my effectiveness as a leader in order to promote change.

One of the multifaceted issues facing African American students is the correlation between academic achievement and the student's, family's, or community's social ties (Maydun, 2011). Furthermore, Madyun discusses how a lack of supervision and peer influence may influence students to make misinformed or poor decisions. A correlation exists between communities with high poverty and unemployment rates and those lacking economic development and resources, which contribute to the choices and behaviors of students, leading them to receive out-of-school suspensions (Brown & Beckett, 2006). The context of this research will be an urban school in a community with a low socioeconomic status that is challenged with school safety and a high number of school disciplinary issues. While certain research discusses some of the effects of poverty on school discipline (Brown & Beckett, 2006; Madyun, 2011), limited research exists on specific interventions that target students' social-emotional needs. This research project

will add to the current research on best practices for superintendents of school districts in impoverished neighborhoods and with low socioeconomic statuses.

Overview of Methodology

The methodology of this research will be self-study. Self-study is a reflective process that helps practitioners deepen their understanding of the craft (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Self-study has its roots in action research. Action research, as defined by Stringer (2014), “is a collaborative approach to inquiry or investigation that provides people with the means to take systematic action to resolve specific problems” (p. 8). I will be engaged in three collaborative, cyclical processes, whereby each cycle will be broken down into the following stages: plan, act, develop, and reflect. The four stages of each cycle are a derivative of Stringer's Look, Think, and Act framework.

During the first cycle of action research, I will use Khalifa et al.'s (2016) Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) framework to build the necessary professional development, systems, and structures to shift the culture from embodying a school-to-prison pipeline (punitive discipline) to a system of supportive and restorative practices. Khalifa et al. conducted a review of literature on CRSL that included 37 journal articles and eight books, ranging from 1989-2014. From these sources, the researchers were able to discover the following four major behaviors of CSRL: critical self-awareness; culturally responsive curricula and teacher preparation; culturally responsive and inclusive school environments; and engaging students and parents in community contexts (Khalifa et al., 2016). The CRSL framework, presented in Table 2, will challenge and assess my practices and beliefs. I will engage in the process of critical self-

reflection. Critical self-reflection will be a catalyst for shifting the disciplinary policies and practices from employing a punitive approach to a restorative one.

Table 2

CRSL Critical Self-Awareness

Is committed to continuous learning of cultural knowledge and contexts
Displays a critical consciousness on practice in and out of school; displays self-reflection
Uses school data and indicants to measure CRSL
Uses parent/community voices to measure cultural responsiveness in schools
Using equity audits to measure student inclusiveness, policy, and practice
Challenges Whiteness and hegemonic epistemologies in school
Leading with courage
Is a transformative leader for social justice and inclusion

Source: Khalifa et al., 2016.

The objective of the first cycle is to use the CRSL framework to help me develop a sense of critical self-awareness (Khalifa et al., 2016). The goal is for me to conduct an assessment of my ideologies and practices to promote school change. This reflective process will begin with a review of the current student achievement data (test scores, attendance, suspension rates, graduation rates, etc.) and a review of school policies and procedures. This study hopes to identify interventions that the school principal and administrators can utilize to reduce the number of suspensions and office referrals and to make the school leadership aware of the issues causing them. I will review the literature

and examine the research on the best practices in the area of suspension and expulsion with the school leadership team. This, along with a series of reflective exercises (journaling, data and document analysis, and critical friend interviews), will assist me in creating a job-embedded professional development plan for Johnson School leaders (Leithwood, 2010). Once the scheme is designed and implemented, the data will be collected and then analyzed to determine the focus of the next cycle. The research will have three cycles. The first cycle will span approximately two months (as outlined in Table 3). Additional cycles will span approximately four to five weeks. A tentative outline of Cycle 2 and 3 are displayed in Table 4.

Table 5 provides a breakdown of the data collection aligned with the research questions. The first data analysis will answer the first research question: “What is my role in shifting the school culture from a punitive-based disciplinary structure to using research-based interventions and restorative approaches in school discipline?” To answer the primary question, I will transcribe and code my journal reflections to determine the common themes that align with the Critical Self-Awareness strand of the CRSL. My reflective journal will capture my thoughts, reactions, and actions as I work to implement interventions that will reduce the number of students suspended from school.

Table 3

Timeline: Cycle 1

Stage	Time Frame	Activit(ies)	Data Collection/Data Source
Plan	2/1/18 to 2/8/18	Review and analyze suspension data	Journal reflections and document analysis
		Review and analyze school discipline policies and procedures, school improvement plan, and other documents	
		Discuss issues and findings with stakeholders	
		Critical reflection (via journal prompts)	
Develop	2/11/18 to 2/16/18	Create plan	Journal reflections
		Critical reflection (via journal prompts)	
		Discuss plan with principal and leadership team	
Act	2/18/18 to 3/22/18	Implement plan	Journal reflections
		Observations	
		Stakeholder feedback	
Reflect	3/25/18 to 3/27/18	Compile and review data	Journal reflections
		Critical reflection (via journal prompts)	

Table 4

Timeline: Cycle 2 and 3

Stage	Cycle 2	Cycle 3	Activit(ies)	Data Collection/ Data Source
Plan	3/28/18	4/30/18	Review and analyze Data	Journal reflections and document analysis
			Determine intervention for next cycle	
			Discuss issues and findings with stakeholders	
			Critical reflection (via journal prompts)	
Develop	3/29/19	4/31/18	Create plan	Journal reflections
			Critical reflection (via journal prompts)	
			Discuss plan with principal and leadership team	
Act	4/1/18 to 4/29/18	5/6/18 to 6/10/18	Implement plan	Journal reflections
			Observations	
			Stakeholder feedback	
Reflect	4/30/18	6/10/18 to 6/28/18	Compile and review data	Journal reflections critical friend interview (Cycle 3)
			Critical reflection (via journal prompts)	
			Document analysis (Cycle 3)	
			Critical friend interview (Cycle 3)	

Table 5

Data Collection Plan

Research Question	Data Source	Data Source	Data Source
Primary question: What is my role in shifting the school culture from a punitive-based disciplinary structure to using research-based interventions and restorative approaches in school discipline?	Journal reflections	Document analysis (meeting agendas and notes, and disciplinary policies and procedures)	Critical friend interview
Secondary question: In what ways were my mindset and leadership practices impacted as I led change?	Journal reflections	Document analysis (meeting agendas and notes, and disciplinary policies and procedures)	Critical friend interview
Secondary question: What were my successes?	Journal reflections	Document analysis (meeting agendas and notes, and disciplinary policies and procedures)	Critical friend interview
Secondary question: What were my challenges and/or barriers to success?	Journal reflections	Document analysis (meeting agendas and notes, and disciplinary policies and procedures)	Critical friend interview

In addition to my reflective journal, I will analyze and reflect upon various documents. The documents, created in alignment with my job responsibilities, will include written communications and reports to stakeholders, professional development presentations and notes, meeting agendas and personal notes, and publicly available

school data. The data triangulation will consist of the data from the reflective journals and document analysis. Triangulation enhances the credibility of this study by incorporating information from multiple sources with the intention of clarifying meaning (Stringer, 2014).

Similar to the primary question, journal reflections, observation notes, and critical friend interviews are the source of data triangulation in determining my successes and challenges in reducing the number of students suspended from school. My observation notes, similar to the reflective journal entries, will capture my observations as I conduct building walkthroughs and classroom observations. The notes will not include any specific information, such as student and teacher names; however, the notes will garner attention for the particular actions, practices, and responses to the interventions I am implementing.

In addition to my observation notes, another form of data collection will be transcripts from my interviews with critical friends. Herr and Anderson (2005) state, “most action researchers also seek independent critical friends who can help them problematize the taken-for-granted aspects of their setting interviews” (p. 30). For this research project, I will use a critical friend, an insider to the education field, and an outsider to the education field. Critical friends, according to Herr and Anderson, are “devil’s advocate for alternative explanations of research data” (p. 57). Furthermore, a critical friend will push me to gain a deeper understanding by collaboratively making meaning of my research. Furthermore, I want to challenge myself as a researcher and

attempt to acknowledge and remove my misconceptions and biases through reflective dialogue with my critical friend.

Most importantly, the use of critical friends helps increase the validity of this research (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Using the CSRL framework is remarkably similar to other social justice frameworks. Therefore, social justice will be the type of validity used as the focus of this research. However, the CRSL framework also lends itself to catalytic validity because the framework will help to deepen my understanding of my role in reducing the number of out-of-school suspensions. The expected outcomes of this process will yield change through a self-study approach based on the principles of action research. The difference will be to promote a culturally responsive school by shifting faculty and staff practices, along with school policies and procedures. The critical component of this study will be studying my role and development as a leader as I implement interventions that will reduce suspensions and address the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon (Cramer et al., 2011; Madyun, 2011; Skiba et al., 2014).

Limitations

While action research has commonalities with both quantitative and qualitative analysis, it differs from these approaches in that the participants of the study are in control of the research (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Placing the participants in charge of the research design and methodology puts some limitations on the study itself. As a participant and researcher, my limitations include my ability to promote change while not abusing my power as superintendent. As an educator—both a teacher and an administrator—the majority of my experience has been in the Midwest, working with

populations of students in majority African American public schools of low socioeconomic status.

Each school I have worked with has been faced with a significant number of students who have behavioral, academic, and social challenges. The educational results and district ratings of each school have been different. While this provides me with context and background knowledge to work within school communities that face challenges, similar to Johnson School, it limits the scope of this study. Therefore, the results of this study may not be applicable to schools with: a small demographic of African American students; a percentage of students who do not qualify for free and reduced-price lunch; a location in a rural area; or a geographic location outside of the Midwest.

Additional limitations of action research are the context of the study. According to Stringer (2014):

Action research seeks to enact an approach to inquiry that includes all relevant stakeholders in the process of investigation. It creates a context that enables diverse groups to negotiate their agendas in an atmosphere of mutual trust and acceptance to work toward practical solutions to problems that concern them. (p. 31)

This study focuses solely on my agenda as superintendent of Johnson School. While this plan may be similar to that of other schools, the stakeholders are driving the process and creating interventions that meet the needs of the school. Furthermore, unlike traditional school districts, Johnson School is run by Adams Corporation in partnership with the

Rogers County School District. As the superintendent, I not only report to a school board, but I must also collaborate with the Rogers County School District and my superiors at Adams Corporation. Given these limitations, the interventions for this study may not be applicable in other schools, even if the demographics of the students are similar.

Definition of Key Terms

Alternative Education Program - “An Alternative Education Program is a state-approved program designed to meet the needs of eligible students who are at risk of academic failure. Students are placed in an Alternative Education Program in lieu of expulsion” (Indiana Department of Education, 2016, p.10).

Culturally Responsive Leaders - Culturally responsive leaders develop and support the school staff and promote a climate that makes the whole school welcoming, inclusive, and accepting of minoritized students (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1275).

Culturally Responsive Methods -

Culturally responsive methods refer to methods that use the cultural knowledge, experiences, social and emotional learning needs, and performance styles of diverse students to ensure that classroom management strategies and research-based alternatives to exclusionary discipline are appropriate and effective for the students. (Indiana General Assembly, 2017)

Dropout Rate-Event Report -

The event dropout rate is the percentage of high school students who left school between the beginning of one school year and the beginning of the next without earning a high school diploma or an alternative credential (e.g., a GED). This

report presents a national event dropout rate for students attending public or private schools using data from the Current Population Survey (CPS). Event dropout rates can be used to track annual changes in the dropout behavior of students in the U.S. school system. (McFarland et al., 2016, p. 1)

Dropout Rate-Status Report -

The status dropout rate reports the percentage of individuals in a given age range who are not in school (public or private) and have not earned a high school diploma or an alternative credential. This report presents status dropout rates calculated using both Current Population Survey (CPS) data and data from the American Community Survey (ACS). Over 40 years of data are available for the CPS. The ACS, on the other hand, is available only for more recent years, but covers a broader population and can be used to compute dropout rates for smaller population subgroups. Because the status dropout rate focuses on an overall age group (as opposed to individuals enrolled in school during a particular year), it can be used to study general population issues. (McFarland et al., 2016, p. 1)

Exclusionary Discipline - "‘Exclusionary discipline’ includes in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, expulsion, school-based arrests, school-based referrals to the juvenile justice system, and voluntary or involuntary placement in an alternative education program” (Indiana General Assembly, 2017).

Federal Poverty Level (FPL) -

A measure of income issued every year by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Federal poverty levels are used to determine your eligibility for

certain programs and benefits, including savings on Marketplace health insurance, and Medicaid and CHIP coverage. (U.S. Centers, 2019)

Food Deserts - “as parts of the country vapid of fresh fruit, vegetables, and other healthful whole foods, usually found in impoverished areas. This is largely due to a lack of grocery stores, farmers’ markets, and healthy food providers” (The American Nutrition, 2017).

In-School Suspension (ISS) -

Student is removed from an assigned class or activity to another setting in order to maintain an orderly and effective educational system. During the removal to another setting, the suspension must meet the definition of instructional time. If the instruction provided to a student who is suspended meets the definition of instructional time, the suspension should be counted as an in-school suspension. (Indiana Department of Education, 2016, p. 9)

Instructional Time -

Instructional time is time in which students are participating in an approved course, curriculum or educationally related activity under the direction of a teacher. Instructional time includes a reasonable amount of passing time between classes within a single school building or on a single school campus but does not include lunch or recess. Homework does not meet the criteria for instructional time. (Indiana Department of Education, 2016, p. 9)

Interim Alternative Educational Setting -

“Interim alternative educational setting” means a student's placement when the Public school (Traditional and Charter) removes a student from the student's current placement as a result of any of the following: (1) When a student has been removed for more than ten (10) cumulative instructional days in the same school year, but the removals do not constitute a pattern that results in a change of placement. The Public school (Traditional and Charter) may decide to provide services during the removal in an interim alternative educational setting. (2) When a Case Conference Committee (CCC) determines that a student's conduct is not a manifestation of the student's disability. The CCC may determine that during any period of removal a student will receive services in an interim alternative educational setting. (3) When a student is removed by the Public schools (Traditional and Charter) for not more than forty-five (45) instructional days for weapons, drugs, or serious bodily injury. The student's CCC must determine the appropriate interim alternative educational setting for the period of removal.

(Indiana Department of Education, 2016, p. 9)

Manifestation Determination - When a student with a disability is removed from school for ten or more consecutive days, or for a culmination of 10 or more days in a school year, and the removal constitutes a pattern, a disciplinary change of placement has just occurred. Within 10 instructional days of any decision to change the placement of a student with a disability for violating the disciplinary rules of the school, the student's

case conference committee must meet to determine whether the student's behavior is a manifestation of his/her disability (Indiana Department, 2013).

Out-of-school suspension -

If instruction provided to a student who is suspended does not meet the definition of instructional time, the suspension should be counted as an out-of-school suspension. Students removed from an assigned class or activity to another setting located within the school corporation or building and does not meet the definition of instructional time; the suspension should be reported as an out-of-school suspension. (Indiana Department of Education, 2016, p. 9)

Principal - Principal means a properly certified person who is assigned as the chief administrative officer of a school (Indiana General, 2017, p. 2).

Restorative Approach -

A restorative approach ... recognizes the needs and purposes behind the misbehavior, as well as the needs of those who were harmed by the misbehavior.

A restorative approach works with all participants to create ways to put things right and make plans for future change. Thus, the focus is on the healing that can occur through a collaborative conferencing process. (Stutzman Amstutz & Mullet, 2015, p. 22).

Restorative Discipline - "Restorative discipline adds to the current discipline models, which attempt to prevent or stop misbehavior, and teaches more live-giving experiences...Restorative discipline helps misbehaving students deal with the harm they

have caused to individuals and to the school community” (Stutzman Amstutz & Mullet, 2015, pp. 9-10).

Restorative Justice -

Restorative justice is an umbrella term for a method of handling disputes with its roots in the rituals of indigenous populations and traditional religious practices. A three-pronged system of justice, restorative justice is a non-adversarial approach usually monitored by a neutral professional who seeks to offer justice to the individual victim (the emphasis is primarily on the victim), the offender, and the community, all of whom have been harmed by a crime or other form of wrongdoing. Accountability is stressed as the offender typically offers to make amends for his or her misdeed. (Wormer, 2006, p. 59)

School Choice Scholarship Program - “The Indiana’s Choice Scholarship

Program, commonly referred to as the voucher program, provides scholarship to eligible Indiana students to offset tuition costs at participating schools. Students must satisfy both household income requirements and student eligibility requirements” (Indiana Department, 2017c).

School-to-prison pipeline (STPP) -

The school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) is a construct used to describe policies and practices, especially concerning school discipline, in the public schools and juvenile justice system that decrease the probability of school success for children and youth, and increase the likelihood of adverse life outcomes. (Skiba et al., 2014, p. 462)

Self-Study - A self-study is a reflective process that helps practitioners to deepen their understanding of the craft (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

Superintendent - Superintendent means the chief administrative officer of a school corporation, generally referred to as the superintendent of schools, except, in the case of township schools, the term refers to the county superintendent of schools (Indiana General, 2017, p. 3).

Zero-tolerance Policies – “A philosophy or policy that mandates the application of predetermined consequences, most often severe and punitive in nature, that are intended to be applied regardless of the gravity of behavior, mitigating circumstances, or situational context” (American Psychological Association [APA], 2008, p. 852).

Organization of Dissertation

Chapter II will review the literature on the role of the federal government in public education and provide a review of school discipline and the STPP, which includes: the Gun-Free Schools Act, zero-tolerance policies, and suspension and expulsion statistics. I will then review the research on the best practices for closing the STPP using research-based interventions and restorative disciplinary practices. Chapter II will conclude with a summary of the research on Culturally Responsive Schools, which is the theoretical framework for this study.

Chapter III will review the action research methodology for this study. A review of the method will include background information on the theoretical framework for action research, as well as the process, relationships, and design of the study. This will be preceded by background and contextual information about the school community. This

will be followed by the data collection process, procedures, analysis, and protocols.

Chapter III will conclude with a discussion on bias and validity.

Chapter IV will give a summary of the methodology, school community, and participants. This section will primarily focus on the findings of the study. Chapter V will give an overview of the results and provide a section for discussion. Implications for future research, practices, and recommendations will follow the discussion. The chapter will conclude with limitations, a summary, and conclusions.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview of the Federal Government's Role in Public Education

Introduction

American schools were created to strengthen the social fabric of the republic by providing academic training to produce leaders in government, churches, commerce, and professions (Warren, 2001). According to Haubenreich (2012), “Despite the lack of a centralized system, education played a strong role in several of the colonies more than 100 years before the Declaration of Independence, the Revolution, and the Constitutional Convention” (p. 439). During the American colonial period, citizens created schools that were primarily run by churches and did not operate collectively (Chopin, 2013; Haubenreich, 2012). As a result of the freedom citizens had to create their schools, a combination of schools existed to serve various groups of citizens in separate environments. Thus, privately run schools existed for groups such as the elite, the poor, and those with multiple ethnicities (Chopin, 2013).

During the mid-1800s, various groups of European immigrants were coming to America (Warren, 2001). This upsurge of immigrants changed the homogeneity of the colonies by adding a mixture of cultural values and religious practices (Haubenreich, 2012). The shifts in the population created the need for universal education that would socially control the population by unifying the citizens and creating a shared culture

(Raver, 1989). Thus, common schools were established and operated by local politicians, who had no formal training in education (Chopin, 2013; Haubenreich, 2012; Raver, 1989).

The Common and Modern School Movements

Warren (2001) describes the aim of common schools as “a means to greater purpose ... to harmonize a diverse people, soften their antagonisms, and equip them to function as citizens in a changing society” (p. 245). In addition to socially controlling immigrants, common schools were generated to decrease crime and provide an escape from poverty (Raver, 1989; Warren, 2001). During the common school movement, the state government only operated as a means of support by providing land for the schools. While, on the other hand, the federal Department of Education did not play a significant role in educational governance due to the different issues the government was facing, such as the acquisition of new territory, military expenses, and building roads. Thus, education was not a high priority for the federal government, which left the governance of schools to the states (Warren, 2001). However, the federal government created the first Department of Education in 1867 with the sole purpose of improving education by providing educators with information (Chopin, 2012).

Despite the lack of government involvement in schools, common schools became the model for public education in the United States (Groen, 2008). Politician and educational pioneer, Horace Mann, had the vision to create a common school to serve as a melting pot for all people (Copeland, 2009). Mann, appointed as chair of the Massachusetts board of education, believed that education would improve society

(Groen, 2008; Copeland, 2009). Mann, along with Henry Barnard of Connecticut and Rhode Island and Calvin Henderson Wiley of South Carolina—elected officials of the Whig Party—believed in free public education for all (Groen, 2008).

Mann began to spread educational ideologies that would add additional structure to the American school system. One of these doctrines was the incorporation and emphasis of literacy and a universal curriculum. Mann urged the common schools to incorporate literacy due to the need for citizens to participate in a democratic society that included the election of the public officials. Mann believed that education should be funded through taxes and that the government should have a role in public schools, especially the state board of education (Groen, 2008; Warren, 2001). The most controversial stance of Mann was that public schools should abolish slavery (Warren, 2001).

Despite the controversy of the common school movement, prior to the movement, schools were, according to Warren (2001), “loosely defined, poorly funded, and crudely housed institutions” (p. 245). Although education, through the common school movement, had become more organized, much disorganization still existed. This inefficiency to operate schools collectively stemmed from political differences and the lack of cooperation from school leadership (Chopin, 2012). In the words of Copeland (2009), “Mann hoped for: the development of a democratic citizenry through educating every individual to a high degree, countering class stratification, and encouraging assimilation” (p. 264). The common school movement was not able to accomplish Mann’s vision.

According to Dotts (2015), “The common school movement was rooted in and has consistently been shaped by politics. Yet, when politics or ideology noticeably sneaks into the curriculum, controversy often erupts” (p. 53). The citizens were not satisfied with the progress of the common schools or the local politicians who ran them. Consequently, local schools were combined into citywide districts and were controlled by a superintendent (Chopin, 2012). Reformers thought the consolidation of schools and county oversight would be best to save the rural areas from losing their populations while maintaining a focus on agriculture (Gross, 2013).

The formation of the modern school in the early 1900s was shaped by reformers who researched best practices and influenced states to pass regulatory laws and policies (Chopin, 2012). Educational reformers and superintendents were able to influence state legislators to adopt regulations that would provide for increased state funding to schools, the building of new schools, and a minimum set of school requirements (Gross, 2013). In addition to lobbying for funding, state education officers lobbied for public institutions to provide teacher education programs and to recruit women to become teachers (Warren, 2001).

Compulsory School Attendance

The United States Constitution does not explicitly address public education, and the 10th Amendment does not grant powers specifically stated in the Constitution to the states, so the jurisdiction of education became the responsibility of the state (Yell, 2012). Having much concern for ensuring that citizens were well educated and able to contribute to the democracy, states passed compulsory attendance laws that require “All persons

having care and control of a child to share their custodial authority with state approved teachers for limited periods of time. By compelling all parents to send their children to school . . .” (Imber, Geel, Blokhuis, & Feldman, 2012, p. 13). The very first compulsory attendance laws were passed in 1852 in Massachusetts and in 1867 in Vermont.

However, by 1918, all states had passed compulsory school attendance laws (Yell, 2012).

State laws dictate the age requirements, minimum length of the school day and year, guidelines for enforcement, and exemptions (Imber et al., 2012). In the state of Indiana, students are required to attend school from the age of 7 until the age of 16. The minimum number of days for the school year is 180. Currently in Indiana, students are exempt from compulsory attendance laws for the following reasons:

- serving on the precinct election board or as a helper to a political candidate or party on the day of a municipal, primary, or general election
- when subpoenaed to testify in court
- serving with the National Guard for no more than 10 days
- serving with the Civil Air Patrol for up to 5 days
- attending an educational non-classroom-related activity.

Students who are truant, having an unexcused absence for more than 10 days in a school year, are reprimanded by the juvenile court or the Indiana Department of Child Services (Indiana General Assembly, 2017).

National School Lunch Act

Of the students at Johnson School, 93% qualify for the federally funded free or reduced-price lunch program (Indiana Department, 2017b). The number of students who

qualify for the National School Lunch Act program is one of the criteria used to determine the amount of federal Title I funding Johnson receives (Indiana Department, 2017e). The National School Lunch Act began as the National School Lunch Program.

During the common and modern school movements, the federal government's role in education was nominal; however, the government's authority in public education became amplified through the National School Lunch Program. Providing lunches to children during school hours began as a charitable effort to feed needy children. School lunch programs began in large cities and varied according to location. Some programs were independently operated by school districts, whereas others were privatized or operated by humanitarian organizations (Geist Rutledge, 2015). During the Great Depression in the 1930s, the federal government passed Public Law 320 on August 24, 1936. Public Law 320 required that the government create a separate fund to purchase surplus food to benefit children and farmers. The surplus food was, in short, delivered to local authorities and organizations and then dispensed to schools (USDA, 2017). The early school lunch program provided an opportunity for the federal government to provide jobs to unemployed citizens through the Work Progress Administration (WPA; Geist Rutledge, 2015).

The WPA program continued to provide lunches to needy students in record amounts. By March 1941, the school lunch program was available in all states, serving two million students per day. However, the number of students the program could service began to decrease due to the onset of World War II in 1942 (Geist Rutledge, 2015; USDA, 2017). Food from the lunch program was then being diverted to soldiers. To

secure a permanent school lunch program that would not be affected by national security, politicians began to lobby for a permanent school lunch program backed by legislation. After several hearings, the federal government passed the National School Lunch Act in 1946 (Geist Rutledge, 2015; USDA, 2017).

The purpose of the National School Lunch Act, as quoted by the United States Department of Agriculture (2017), is:

It is hereby declared to be the policy of Congress, as a measure of national security, to safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation's children and to encourage the domestic consumption of nutritious agricultural commodities and other food, by assisting the States, through grants-in aid and other means, in providing an adequate supply of food and other facilities for the establishment, maintenance, operation and expansion of nonprofit school lunch programs. (p. 2)

National Defense Act

In addition to the National School Lunch, the federal government's control in education increased because the public became concerned with education in 1957, when the Soviet Union launched a satellite into space, beating the United States (Chopin, 2012; Tanner, 2013). Citizens began to blame public education for not being able to meet the needs of children or to provide innovation in the sciences (Chopin, 2012; Kyle & Jenks, 2002). Kessinger's (2011) research states:

Indeed many in the U.S. voiced concerns that the U.S. was losing ground or its earlier scientific edge or dominance from the WWII era and therefore relinquishing its position to the Soviets. The question then was: Is the U.S.

faltering; and, if so, what is causing the backward shift? Some believed the problem lay with the schools and with progressive ideas, a prevailing educational theory that dominated more than a few schools at the time. (p. 268)

As a result of public scrutiny over education, the federal government passed the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958. The NDEA provided post-secondary funding in the subject areas of math, science, and foreign languages (Kessinger, 2011). The residual effect of the NDEA has been an increased focus on high school curricula, including math, science, and foreign languages. In the state of Indiana, the Core 40 legislation requires that all high school graduates must earn six credit hours of math and science, along with elective credit hours in a foreign language (Indiana Department, 2017d).

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka

Another event that augmented public distrust in education was the historic *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* case (*Brown* decision). The root of distrust existed because school officials were contributing to institutional segregation (Chopin, 2012). The *Brown* decision, as cited by Merritt (2005), “is one of the greatest achievements of the American Judicial system. It decisively declared racial segregation in the schools unconstitutional, inaugurating the modern civil rights era” (p. 51). The *Brown* decision overturned the *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling that dictated separate but equal by citing the equal protection clause under the 14th Amendment to the United States Constitution (Nichols, 2005). The historic decision prompted civil rights protests that led the United States Congress to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Both pieces of legislation advanced the aim of the *Brown* decision, equality for all, far

beyond the scope of education (Carson, 2004). Despite the federal court's move to integrate the schools, the legislation was not consistently implemented. Evidence 10 years after the *Brown* decision showed that 98% of African Americans in the South were still attending segregated schools (Carson, 2004).

The Vocational Act of 1963

Simultaneously paving the way for federal education reform, the Vocational Educational Act of 1963 evolved as the public became disturbed by the number of unemployed people (Page, 1984). According to Page:

In the 1960s, high levels of unemployment were perceived to be due, in part, to vocational education's lack of sensitivity to the labor market and the needs of various segments of the population. The Vocational Educational Act of 1963, which was operative by 1965, addressed these perceived needs. Amendments in 1968 emphasized a "unified system of vocational education" which presented much of the substance of the career education concept. Attempts to implement the 1968 amendments were influenced by growing bodies of theory and research on career development, utilization of community resources, and the introduction of "occupational clusters" as a means of organizing curriculum. (p. 142)

The impact of the Vocational Act of 1963 and the revisions in 1968 extended career preparation courses to the high school curriculum through federal funding. Today, vocational courses are referred to as career and technical education (CTE) courses. In the state of Indiana, high schools offer CTE courses to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate postsecondary success (Indiana Department, 2018a). In fact, high schools

earn points on the Indiana Report Card for the percentage of students who complete CTE course pathways (Indiana Department, 2017a). Johnson currently offers CTE courses in business and engineering.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965

As a result of the public disapproval of education, the federal government's role in education increased through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson on April 11, 1965 (Chopin, 2012; Nelson, 2016; Shoffner, 2016). The *Brown* decision, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the ESEA gave the executive branch of the U.S. government the power to enforce desegregation through funding regulations (Hilbert, 2017). Despite resistance from local governments, President Johnson was able to advance his campaign on the war on poverty and place sanctions on schools unwilling to desegregate (Chopin, 2012). According to Nelson (2016):

It [ESEA] pledged a billion dollars a year to aid disadvantaged students in K-12 public schools. It gave federal aid to strengthen (1) school libraries, (2) state departments of education, and (3) education research . . . and subsequent amendments gave aid for (4) bilingual education, and (5) students with disabilities. (p. 359)

The ESEA was the first time in history that the federal government had provided funds to schools that served students of poverty. However, the receipt of the federal funds required schools to remain compliant with federal government regulations, primarily civil rights provisions (Chopin, 2012). Binding federal funding to the nation's policy concerns

denoted the importance of the federal government's role in and relationship with public education (Kessinger, 2011).

Altschuld and Thomas (1991) note that the ESEA prompted an era of educational evaluation, due, in part, to the massive investment of federal funds in education. The ESEA evaluators were novice, receiving little to no training in assessment, which prompted significant concern. The following, as cited by Altschuld and Thomas, are criticisms of the ESEA's evaluative nature: "(a) a lack of training for evaluators (b) inadequate or missing models and theories of educational evaluation, (c) vague federal guidelines for the conduct of evaluation, and (d) inappropriate methodological approaches for educational context" (p. 22). In addition to evaluation, school districts, previously controlled by a single superintendent, were now controlled by federal court-created policies. However, states were responsible for distributing federal funds to school districts, which created another level of bureaucracy and a greater focus on compliance (Chopin, 2013).

Special Education

Special Education State-created compulsory education laws, coupled with the federal government's ESEA, sought to provide economically disadvantage students with schooling. However, students with disabilities are often excluded from public schools (Yell, 2012). The civil rights movement and the historic *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* case paved the way for the federal government to pass the following pieces of legislation:

- The Education of the Handicapped Act of 1970

- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EACHA) of 1975. (Yell, 2012)

The Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA) of 1970 provided federal funds through the ESEA for colleges and universities to develop programs that would train teachers of students with disabilities. The EHA was essential legislation that advanced to the passing of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Section 504, replacing the Vocational Education Act of 1963, prohibited discrimination of any person with disabilities by any institution receiving federal funds (U.S. Department, 2017h; Yell, 2012).

Shortly after Section 504, the EACHA, now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), made it lawful and mandatory for millions of students with disabilities to receive: “non-discriminatory testing, evaluation, and placement procedures; education in the least restrictive environment; procedural due process, including parent involvement; and a Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE)” (Yell, 2012, p. 53). The IDEA defines FAPE as special education and related services that:

- are provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction, and without charge
- meet the standards of state educational agencies
- include an appropriate preschool, elementary, or secondary school education in the state involved

- are provided in conformity with the individualized education program. (Yell, 2012, p. 182)

In 1990, the EAHCA was renamed the IDEA, and legislation added traumatic brain injury as a disability and required for transition plans for 16-year-olds. Another subsequent amendment was made in 1997, adding disciplinary provisions, making changes to the Individual Education Program Team, and requiring states to provide parents mediation before going to due process (Yell, 2012).

The IDEA was modified in 1994 and, most recently, in 2015 with the revision of the ESEA. The Every Student Succeeds Act states:

Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities. (U.S. Department, 2017g, para. 5)

According to the National Center for Education Statics (2017), in 2014-2015, there were 6.6 million students in the United States receiving special education services. Of those students, 35% had a specified learning disability, 20% had a speech or language impairment, 9% had autism, and 5% had an emotional disturbance (National Center, 2017).

A Nation at Risk

The ESEA ushered in an era of increased federal funding in public education through supplementary financial aid that required states and local school districts to comply with mandates. Despite the government's attempts through the ESEA to standardize education and provide equal opportunities for poor and African American children, the public was once again concerned with education in the early 1980s (Chopin, 2013; Nelson, 2016). Thus, on August 26, 1981, United States Secretary of Education T.H. Bell created the National Commission on Excellence in Education. The commission aimed to produce a report to examine public education and make recommendations for improvement. The result was a report entitled *A Nation at Risk*, which was released in April of 1983 (U.S. Department of Education, 2017b).

During the process of compiling *A Nation at Risk*, the commission documented, as indicated by the U.S. Department of Education (2017b), the following educational indicators:

- International comparisons of student achievement completed a decade ago reveal that on 19 academic tests, American students were never first or second and, in comparison with other industrialized nations, were last seven times.
- Approximately 13% of all 17-year-olds in the United States can be considered functionally illiterate. Functional illiteracy among minority youth may run as high as 40%.
- Many 17-year-olds do not possess the "higher order" intellectual skills we should expect of them. Nearly 40% cannot draw inferences from written

material, only one-fifth can write a persuasive essay, and only one-third can solve a mathematics problem requiring several steps.

- Business and military leaders complain that they are required to spend millions of dollars on costly remedial education and training programs in such basic skills as reading, writing, spelling, and computation. (para. 12)

The recommendations from the commission, as documented by the U.S. Department of Education (2017c), are as follows:

- State and local high school graduation requirements be strengthened and that, at a minimum, all students seeking a diploma be required to lay the foundations in the Five New Basics by taking the following curriculum during their 4 years of high school: (a) 4 years of English; (b) 3 years of mathematics; (c) 3 years of science; (d) 3 years of social studies; and (e) one-half year of computer science. For the college-bound, 2 years of foreign language in high school are strongly recommended, in addition to those taken earlier.
- That schools, colleges, and universities adopt more rigorous and measurable standards and higher expectations for academic performance and student conduct and that 4-year colleges and universities raise their requirements for admission. This will help students do their best educationally with challenging materials in an environment that supports learning and authentic accomplishment.

- That significantly more time be devoted to learning the New Basics. This will require more effective use of the existing school day, a longer school day, or a lengthened school year.
- Improve the preparation of teachers or make teaching a more rewarding and respected profession.
- The citizens across the nation hold educators and elected officials responsible for providing the leadership necessary to achieve these reforms and that citizens provide the financial support and stability required to bring about the reforms we propose.

The findings and recommendations of the report intensified the federal government's regulations in public education. As a result, Congress passed Goals 2000 and the Improving America's School Act (Chopin, 2013).

Goals 2000 and Improving America's School Act

The Goals 2000, passed in March of 1994, outlined, as cited by Chopin (2013), the following national educational benchmarks:

- (1) every child should be ready to attend school;
- (2) all schools will have a graduation rate of at least 90%;
- (3) all students will be proficient in the core subjects, as demonstrated by their passing of state tests in Grades 4, 8, and 12;
- (4) teachers will be provided with increased and improved opportunities for professional development;
- (5) the United States will rank first in the world in math and science;

- (6) every adult will be literate;
- (7) all schools will be drug-, alcohol-, firearm-, and violence-free
- (8) parental involvement will increase.

Goals 2000 established a framework for the 1994 reauthorization of the ESEA, the Improving America's School Act (IASA). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2017d), the foundation for the IASA was built on a comprehensive plan to improve education through the following four key elements: "high standards for all students, teachers better trained for teaching to high standards; flexibility to stimulate local reform, coupled with accountability for results; and close partnerships among families, communities, and schools" (para. 1). To receive federal funding, the IASA required states to create a plan for meeting Goals 2000. Thus, reauthorization of the ESEA steered public education into the age of accountability (Chopin, 2013).

No Child Left Behind

As the year 2000 passed, public education did not meet the aims of Goals 2000 or the IASA. Therefore, with bipartisan support, in 2002, President Bush signed into act No Child Left Behind (NCLB). NCLB addressed the following educational areas: state teaching standards, standards alignment curriculum and assessments, teacher accountability, school accountability, state accountability, teacher quality, special needs of traditionally low-achieving students, achievement gap, distribution of resources, flexibility to local schools, enrichment and accelerated content, access to researched strategies, access to challenging content, professional development, and parental involvement (Chopin, 2013). The federal government, for the first time, tied

accountability as determined by standardized tests to funding (Chopin, 2013; Shoffner, 2016).

The intentions of NCLB were to improve education by setting a standard that all schools were to attain 100% proficiency by 2014. For schools failing to achieve the predetermined measures of success, the federal government could issue sanctions (i.e., mandatory tutoring, afterschool programs, or school closures) to such schools (Shoffner, 2016). The most extreme penalties for a failing school, according to Chopin (2013), could be turning the school into a charter school, replacing the staff members, contracting the school to another organization, a state takeover, or restructuring the school. Given the steep consequences for poor student performances on standardized tests, critics deemed that NCLB put pressure on schools to teach to the test (Shoffner, 2016).

Race to the Top

Regardless of the exertions of NCLB, school districts were forced to use standardized methods that left many students behind. Once again, the public was concerned about our nation's efforts to improve public education (Shoffner, 2016). President Obama's attempt to address NCLB was through the 2009 Race to the Top (RTT) Fund. According to the Department of Education (2017e), RTT awarded \$4 billion to states to advance reforms in the following areas:

- adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy;
- building data systems that measure student growth and success and informing teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction;

- recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and
- turning around our lowest-achieving schools.

The goals of RTT, as published by the U.S. Department of Education (2015), were:

to bring together leaders from every level of school governance — from classroom teachers to state-level officials — to develop plans that would help prepare students for success in an information- and innovation-driven job market, where a quality education is essential both to national economic strength and to individual opportunity. (p. 6)

Eleven states, including the District of Columbia, were awarded RTT funds in the first phase of the program. The total students and educators impacted by state participation in RTT were: 10,668,155 students, 746,795 teachers, and 21,543 principals (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The results, per the U.S. Department of Education (2015), for the participating states, were as follows:

- an increase of 23.6% in students enrolled in A.P. courses
- an increase of 20.8% in students earning a 3 or better on A.P. exams
- a 4.4% increase in the number of students graduating from high school.

RTT encouraged collaboration and partnership among educational leaders, teachers, parents, community-based organizations, colleges/universities, and other stakeholders to improve their academic systems and structures. Some examples of the work completed through RTT funds include observation and evaluation systems with ongoing feedback to teachers; data review cycles and the use of data dashboards; implementation of a full

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) model; and implementation of multiple approaches to professional development. Despite any obstacles and challenges, each state receiving RTT funds exhibited academic improvement (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Every Student Succeeds Act

Using the research and development from RTT, President Obama, with bipartisan support, reauthorized the ESEA on December 10, 2015, with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; United States Department of Education, 2017f). The ESSA, according to Shoffner (2016), shifts the decision-making power of the federal government to create educational guidelines to the states. Furthermore, the ESSA eliminates the requirements for national standardized testing, thereby enabling states to assess their own educational needs. The United States Department of Education (2017f) lists the following provisions of the ESSA:

- Advances equity by upholding critical protections for America's disadvantaged and high-need students.
- Requires—for the first time—that all students in America be taught to high academic standards that will prepare them to succeed in college and careers.
- Ensures that vital information is provided to educators, families, students, and communities through annual, statewide assessments that measure students' progress toward those high standards.

- Helps to support and grow local innovations—including evidence-based and place-based interventions developed by local leaders and educators—consistent with our Investing in Innovation and Promise Neighborhoods.
- Sustains and expands this administration's historic investments in increasing access to high-quality preschool.
- Maintains an expectation that there will be accountability and action to effect positive change in our lowest-performing schools, where groups of students are not making progress, and where graduation rates are low over extended periods of time.

Discipline and the School-to-Prison Pipeline

School districts have the authority to monitor and control student discipline issues (Brady, 2002). To maintain the safety of both the students and the staff, school leaders use policies and procedures to exclude disruptive students from the educational environment through suspension and expulsion (Wilson, 2013). Research by the American Psychological Association (APA)'s Zero Tolerance Task Force indicates that suspension and expulsion do not improve a school's culture and climate. Rather, students of color are disproportionately disciplined, suspended, and expelled in comparison to their White peers (APA, 2008).

Disproportionately suspending and expelling black and brown students is referred to as “school-to-prison pipeline” (Sikba et al., 2014). Skiba et al. writes:

The school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) is a construct used to describe policies and practices, especially concerning school discipline, in the public schools and

juvenile justice system that decrease the probability of school success for children and youth, and increase the likelihood of adverse life outcomes. (p. 462)

Removing or changing a student's educational setting contributes to the marginalization of black and brown students. Excluding students from their educational setting often occurs when teachers deem students to be disruptive to the educational environment (Wilson, 2013). Black and brown students are suspended from school four times more than their White peers, raising the concern that students' civil rights are potentially being violated (CCRR, 2015). This type of cultural marginalization results in black and brown students dropping out of school and possibly leads to a pattern of criminal behavior that will result in incarceration (Cramer et al., 2014).

Historically, zero tolerance began in the 1980s through juvenile boot camps. Boot camps were often mandated by courts and were created to combat drugs and violence. Contradictory to the purpose of the boot camps, most of the participants were eventually incarcerated (Wilson, 2013). Zero-tolerance policies made their way into schools as America was attempting to combat the drugs and violence inside school buildings. The Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 required that schools expel students for bringing firearms or explosives or for committing arson at school. Schools that did not comply would be in jeopardy of losing federal funding (Wilson, 2013).

Schools are replicating exclusion practices similar to our society's judicial system. It is the norm of the American legal system to incarcerate persons who face difficulties, including those who are disabled or suffering from addiction (Wilson, 2013). In the school setting, teachers respond to student misbehaviors by removing them from

the classroom. In cases where there are students who consistently misbehave, teachers have low academic expectations, which lead to low levels of student engagement and participation, placing these students on the path to becoming disconnected and eventually dropping out of school. Research shows that students who are often suspended have a higher chance of dropping out, and students who drop out have a higher chance of being incarcerated (APA, 2008).

Excluding students who misbehave is problematic and does not address the root cause of the student's behavior. More importantly, exclusionary practices result in students not receiving academically rigorous instruction (Benner, Kutash, Nelson, & Fisher, 2013). According to Skiba et al. (2014), "Although intended to improve behavior and achievement by removing disruptive students and deterring others from engaging in similar behavior, data suggest that school exclusion for disciplinary purposes is likely to be associated with negative academic and behavioral outcomes" (p. 553). Essentially, schools using exclusionary practices are ignoring the needs of the students and deeming them defective "throw-aways" (Psycher & Lozenski, 2014).

The APA's (2008) Zero Tolerance Task Force recommends that schools and school districts reform zero-tolerance policies and implement alternatives practices. The APA's (2008) recommendations are listed in Appendix D.

Alternatives to Zero Tolerance

Professional Development and Training

The APA's (2008) Zero Tolerance Task Force recommends that schools and districts train teachers to use culturally responsive behavior management and instruction

techniques (B.2.2) and to provide training so that faculty and staff members can address sensitivity related to issues of race (B.2.3). Professional development and training are essential in changing adult mindsets from the traditional approach to discipline to a restorative approach. According to Goldys (2016), “learning something that becomes part of your being takes time, practice, understanding, and change in mindset” (p. 77). For example, Norwood STEM in Baltimore, MD, implemented a four-year plan to change to a restorative approach to school discipline. At the end of the four years, all staff members had received training and support that was essential to shifting the adult mindsets (Goldys, 2016).

Training teachers to use culturally responsive behavior management in the classroom is vital to maximizing instructional time (APA, 2008). Furthermore, there remains a cultural and socioeconomic disconnect between the teachers and students of poverty that result in teacher misconceptions and miscommunication. Some of the misconceptions are regarding parental values and child-rearing practices (Kunjufu, 2002). Additional research shows that teachers who are from the same cultural/ethnic background can relate to the culture of the students and address the student misbehavior with minimal disruption to the learning environment (Brown & Beckett, 2006). However, the majority of teachers are White, middle-class women (Kunjufu, 2002).

Given that teachers are considered middle class, it is imperative that schools provide professional development to address the sensitive issues surrounding race and class (APA, 2008; Kunjufu, 2002). Teacher development, especially in urban communities, is critical to student success because high poverty and student mobility

rates have a direct effect on school discipline (Brown & Beckett, 2006). Madyun's (2011) research states that there is interconnectedness between academic achievement and a student's, family's, or community's social ties. It is not a family's inability to purchase school supplies. However, poverty has contributed to a family's failure to network and "implement solutions to address academic problems" (p. 25). Furthermore, a lack of adult supervision and peer influence can influence students to make misinformed or poor decisions. Therefore, a lack of economic development and proper nutrition as well as and high unemployment rates are contributing to the choices and behaviors of students, which lead to students receiving out-of-school suspensions (Maydun, 2011).

Providing teachers with professional development and training focused on understanding the sensitive issues of race and class is paramount to addressing zero-tolerance discipline policies and practices (APA, 2008). Schools should focus on challenging beliefs because "unchallenged beliefs in educators can lead to complacency, acceptance of failure, and low teacher expectations for African American and other underserved student populations" (Cowan, 2014, p. 214). Furthermore, schools should focus on the factors that are within their control. Leithwood's (2010) research found that job-embedded professional development was one of the common characteristics of districts that have been successful in closing the achievement gap. Teachers and instructional leaders need support and training to expand their impact across the school (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012).

Supports and Interventions

In addition to recommending professional development and training, the APA's (2008) Zero Tolerance Task Force recommends to "develop a planned continuum of effective alternatives for those students whose behavior threatens the discipline or safety of the school" (p. 859).

The creation of a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) functions as a structured way to provide the resources and support for students with social/emotional challenges. According to Benner et al. (2013):

Consistent with the core principles of MTSS, positive behavior intervention and supports (PBIS) uses a continuum of behavioral interventions to understand and meet youth social, emotional, and behavioral needs. PBIS is an MTSS framework for behavior, establishing the social culture and behavioral supports needed for schools to be effective learning environments for all youth... PBIS holds particular promise for students with or at-risk for E/BD as a unified structure to (a) prevent the development of E/BD and (b) address existing instances. (p. 5)

Therefore, implementing PBIS as an intervention is a tool that can be used to support all students, especially those who are at-risk.

Further research shows that MTSS, along with positive behavior supports and interventions, will provide support to students and help reduce the achievement gap and the school-to-prison pipeline (Cowan, 2014; Cramer et al., 2011; Eber, Hyde, & Suter, 2011; Madyun, 2011; Skiba et al., 2014). Disciplinary infractions "can be opportunities for learning, growth, and community building" (Stutzman Amstutz & Mullet, 2015, p. 3).

However, solely focusing on extrinsic rewards, punishments, and social–emotional interventions do not teach students how to organically solve problems before their actions escalate to behavioral infractions (Goldys, 2016).

Restorative Discipline

Restorative discipline is a holistic way to teach students to “deal with the harm they have caused to individuals and to the school community” (Stutzman Amstutz & Mullet, 2015, p. 10). School discipline, in its traditional state, is quick and inadequate and teaches children to comply with rules. On the contrary, restorative discipline and approaches hold students accountable for their actions while working to repair harm and restore broken relationships (High, 2017; Stutzman Amstutz & Mullet, 2015). Restorative discipline is a framework that can be used as a blueprint or alternative method to traditional school discipline (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015; Stutzman Amstutz & Mullet, 2015; Zehr, 2002).

Historically, restorative discipline emerged from restorative justice, which is used in the criminal justice system as a way to address problems and limitations with the legal system (Stutzman Amstutz & Mullet, 2015). Restorative justice combines conventional criminal justice practices with the tenants and methods of the social work field. These practices, similar to restorative discipline, include conflict resolution, dialogue, healing circles, and victim–offender conferencing (Wormer, 2006). Restorative justice, according to Zehr (2002), is based on the following principles:

1. Focuses on harms and consequent needs (victims' but also communities' and offenders')

2. Addresses obligations resulting from those harms (offenders' but also families', communities', and society's)
3. Uses inclusive, collaborative processes
4. Involves those with a legitimate stake in the situation (victims, offenders, families, community members, society)
5. Seeks to put right the wrongs. (p. 39)

Restorative justice seeks to repair the harm that has been done. It then emphasizes that the offenders be held accountable and take responsibility for the harm. Lastly, it engages the victim, the offender, and others who may have been affected in the justice process. Restorative justice uses an inclusive, collaborative process to address harm and make things right. This framework is contrary to the traditional practices of the criminal justice system that solely focus on punishment and consequences (Zehr, 2002).

Implementing restorative discipline will, according to the APA's (2008) Zero Tolerance Task Force, "improve school climate and improve the sense of school community and belongingness" (p. 858). Restorative discipline changes the culture and climate because it eliminates alienation and yields opportunities for reflection, relationship building, and justice for the entire school community (Knight & Wadhwa, 2014). Resolving conflicts within a school community is essential for creating a positive school culture and climate because all who are involved in a conflict "must continue to be in relationship with one another" (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015, p. 19). For example, it is almost impossible to completely separate two students who are in conflict. A principal may place the two students in different classrooms, but those students may come in

contact before school, after school, in passing, during lunch, and through mutual acquaintances.

A restorative approach to discipline focuses on solving the conflict and coming up with a solution that is fair and agreed upon by both the victim and the offender (Stutzman Amstutz & Mullet, 2015). This is a supportive process that does not belittle either the victim or the offender (Mirsky, 2011). The principal goals of restorative discipline, according to Stutzman Amstutz and Mullet (2015), are:

- To understand the harm and develop empathy for both the harmed and the harmer.
- To listen and respond to the needs of the person harmed and the person who harmed.
- To encourage accountability and responsibility through personal reflection in a collaborative planning process.
- To reintegrate the harmer (and, if necessary, the harmed) into the community as valuable, contributing members.
- To create caring climates to support healthy communities.
- To change the system when it contributes to the harm. (p. 10)

Restorative discipline provides a framework for schools to teach students self-discipline, accountability, empathy, and ways in which they can take responsibility to repair harm. Furthermore, restorative discipline is used to prevent conflict and to mend and restore relationships (Stutzman Amstutz & Mullet, 2015).

Restorative practices stress the importance of building, mending, and maintaining

relationships over compliance with rules (Haney, Thomas, & Vaughn, 2011). According to Mirsky (2011), “informal restorative practices can actually have an even greater effect on school culture because they are cumulative and become a part of everyday life” (p. 47). The principles and concepts of restorative discipline must be integrated into the school culture. The adults in the school community are essential and must also model the restorative approaches and practices that are expected of the students. The most common restorative methods and strategies used in a restorative discipline framework are reintegration following suspension, class meetings, circles, and conferencing (Stutzman Amstutz & Mullet, 2015).

Circle Processes and Practices

Circle processes, referred to as peace circles, healing circles, or talking circles, are a common method or approach used in a restorative discipline framework (Haney et al., 2011; Stutzman Amstutz & Mullet, 2015). The practice of using circles is derived from the indigenous teachings and traditions of Native North Americans, who used circles to discuss essential matters (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015; High, 2017; Pranis, 2005). According to Haney et al. (2011): “when school infractions occur, antithetical to retribution, restorative practices rely heavily on circle/ conferencing group encounters . . . This is a social process, theoretically and practically, that intends to mend a school’s cultural fabric” (p. 56). Circles are a way to strengthen communication, build relationships, and solve problems in communities, schools, and courtrooms (Pranis, 2005).

In a school context, circles are used for community building, student disciplinary

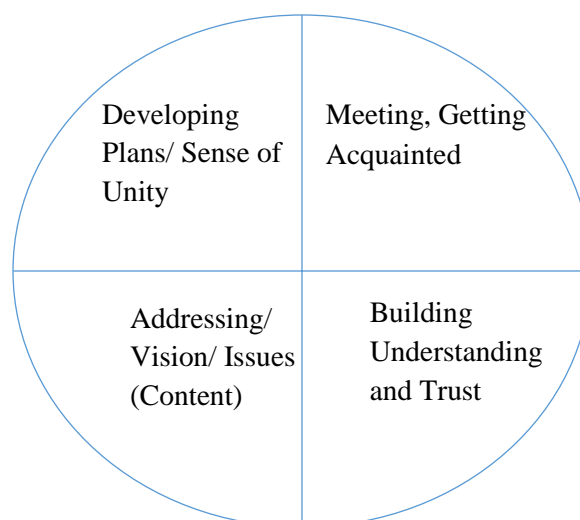
issues, faculty and staff development, and academic discussions (Goldys, 2016). Circles, according to Stutzman Amstutz and Mullet (2015), “can be used to create an atmosphere where every person feels his or her voices matters, where students are allowed to learn according to their needs, and where life skills are taught and valued” (p. 52). The circle process helps to empower both students and adults. It is the ritualistic nature of circles that removes privilege, gives voice to all participants, provides a sense of belonging, and creates a happy environment. Circles become a safe place in which participants can authentically be themselves (Pranis, 2005).

Theoretically, circles are built on shared values and promote interconnectedness among the circle participants. Circles draw upon the need for humans to positively connect to one another. Everything in the universe is connected, and therefore, when harm is done to one, it affects all (Pranis, 2005). Stutzman Amstutz and Mullet (2015) state that circles are based on the following premises:

- Each of us wants to be connected to others in a good way.
- Each of us is a valued member of the community and has a right to his or her beliefs.
- We all share some core values that indicate what connecting in a good way means (even though being connected in a good way and acting from our values are not always easy to do, especially during times of difficult conversations or conflict). (p. 53)

As circles are integrated into a school community, the community learns how to meet the needs of both individuals and groups. The integration leads to a practice that includes

respect, equality, empathy, emotional literacy, problem solving, responsibility, self-regulation, self-awareness, and shared leadership (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015).



Source: Pranis, 2005, p. 42.

Figure 1. The Four Relational Elements of Circles

Implementing circles in a school setting is challenging because it is entirely different from the traditional routines and procedures of a school. Every person in a circle has a voice and should be heard, which requires that participants give their undivided attention while participating in a circle. This is contrary to our culture, in which we are accustomed to multitasking. Furthermore, circles are nonhierarchical. Authority figures do not control the outcomes, and adults must adhere to the circle guidelines in the same manner as students. Both adults and students are expected to share their emotions, experiences, and feelings at their level of comfort. Finally, circles prioritize trust and relationship building. While students can adapt to the circle practice, many adults find it challenging to relinquish their authority (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015).

The circle keeper is responsible for planning and preparing the circle activities. It

is important to note that circle keepers are merely facilitators who do not control the circle. Circle keepers are active participants who have been trained to lead the circle activities, keep the circle safe, and uphold the guidelines (Stutzman Amstutz & Mullet, 2015). Figure 1 shows the phases of planning circle activities. In the first phase of planning, circle keepers should begin to think of ways to greet the participants and get them acquainted. Next, keepers should plan activities that help to build trust and connections so that participants feel safe to speak their truth. Relationship and trust building are key to the effectiveness of a circle and may take time. Without the interconnectedness, participants will not be able to express themselves authentically. Once trust has been established, the issue or problem at hand can be discussed using question rounds. Lastly, the participants should feel unified as a group and be able to come to a consensus regarding conflicts or other issues (Pranis, 2005).

The structural elements of a circle, according to Boyes-Watson and Pranis (2015), are as follows:

- Seating all the participants in a circle (preferably without any tables)
- Mindfulness moment
- Opening Ceremony
- Centerpiece
- Talking Piece
- Identifying values
- Generating guidelines based on the values
- Agreements (if the circle is making decisions)

- Closing ceremony. (p. 28)

Given that circles promote shared leadership, interconnectedness, and an absence of authority, participants should be seated in a circle. The mindfulness moment, a simple chime or ring of a bell, officially starts the circle by helping the participants to be fully present. The opening ceremony helps to create a sacred space and is often an inspirational reading or breathing technique. The focal point of the circle is a centerpiece placed in the middle of the circle on the floor. Centerpieces should include items that represent the values of the entire group and each participant to symbolize connectedness and mutual understandings. The talking piece is used to help regulate the conversation. Participants, while not required to speak, should only speak when they have the talking piece. The use of a talking piece ensures that each member of the circle has equity of voice (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015).

The values of the circles should be created by having each member contribute by writing down his or her values and sharing them with the circle (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015). Next, all participants must create guidelines that establish clear expectations for the circle. Once the entire group agrees by consensus, everyone is responsible for implementing the guidelines and keeping the circle safe (Pranis, 2005). If the circle is established to solve a conflict, the group, by consensus, must come up with a shared understanding of how the problem will be resolved. Lastly, the circle should always end with a closing ceremony, which is often a cultural expression or short inspirational reading. The closing ceremony affirms the interconnectedness of the participants (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015).

Schools across the country are using circles processes to build communities, solve problems, and decrease the number of out-of-school suspensions. At Norwood Elementary School in Baltimore, Maryland, circles are used for faculty staff meetings, building community, teaching problem solving, and for student disciplinary infractions. After strategically implementing circles, Norwood experienced a “55% decrease in office referrals; 49% decrease in time missed from instruction; 55% decrease in physical aggression; 97.7% of students feel safe in school; and over 20,000 minutes back in the classroom compared to last year” (Goldys, 2016, p. 75).

Project Graduation in Boston implemented circles to support 60 high school students who were on the verge of dropping out. Students participated in circles on a weekly basis and in smaller circles to solve problems and conflicts. The objective of the circles was to build relationships and help students to become resilient. While the circles immediately impacted some students, others needed additional support. The circle process not only influenced the students but also helped the adults to create a safe and supportive environment for the students. As a result, every student improved both academically and socially (Knight & Wadhwa, 2014).

Restorative processes, such as peace circles, offer a new and alternative approach to discipline and justice (Wormer, 2006). Circles provide both students and adults with an opportunity to build the relationships needed to tackle issues such as bullying (Stutzman Amstutz & Mullet, 2015). Circles also promote resiliency in both students and adults, as demonstrated by the Project Graduation students (Knight & Wadhwa, 2014). The overall premise of circles is to build trust and strengthen relationships so that people can have

difficult conversations, solve issues, repair harm, have compassion, and take responsibility (Pranis, 2005). Implementing circles has the potential to improve a school's culture and to decrease the number of office referrals and out-of-school suspensions (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015; Goldys, 2016; Knight & Wadhwa, 2014; Pranis, 2005).

Educational Leadership and Administration: From Past to Present

Educational leadership and administration have a vast and developing body of research. Historically, as our nation's educational focus shifted, leadership structures, theories, and best practices changed in alignment to meet the needs of public education (Burkman, 2010). Murphy's (1998) research establishes the following four eras or doctrines in school leadership: the Ideological Era (1820-1899), Prescriptive Era (1900-1946), Scientific Era (1947-1985), and Dialectic Era (1986-). During the Ideological Era, public schools were an insignificant part of society. Therefore, the number of school leaders was relatively small, and their roles were to supervise. School leaders were not formally trained until the Prescriptive Era, and the training received was the same for both teachers and leaders (Burkman, 2010; Murphy, 1998).

During the Prescriptive Era, political, civil, and business leaders were chosen for school leadership (Burkman, 2010). The focus of this era of school leadership was accountability and preparing students for industry (Fine, 1997). Furthermore, the Great Depression and World War II resulted in school leaders becoming social agents (Burkman, 2010; Murphy, 1998). Fine's (1997) research discusses the emergence of the influence of scientific management on educational leadership. Scientific management,

according to Fine, “was a way for managers to impose unilateral control over all aspects of industrial operations” (p. 289). School leaders in this era prepared students for industrial careers. Schools operated like plants, and the product was the student (Fine, 1997).

The Scientific Era transpired behavioral science and management and social change as educational leadership theories (Burkman, 2010). The educational report, *A Nation at Risk*, was published toward the end of this era and transitioned the focus of leadership to the Dialectic Era. The leadership focus during the Dialectic Era, which, according to Burkman, ended in 1998, was academic standards, equality, and educational reform. As a result, the following organizations were formed: the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the National Commission for the Principals, and the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC; Burkman, 2010).

Currently, our educational leadership era has not been defined by research (Burkman, 2010). However, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA; 2015), formerly known as the ISLLC, revised its educational leadership standards to meet the growing and changing needs of educational leadership. The new standards, applicable to both district and school leaders, were developed from research-based best practices to promote academic success and well-being for all students (NPBEA, 2015).

These standards should also influence the core curriculum for educational leadership preparation programs. Furthermore, the standards are not static and should be updated to meet the needs of our nation's public schools (NPBEA, 2015).

Culturally Responsive School Leadership

Culturally responsive leadership, derived from culturally responsive teaching, requires school leaders to be empowering; push education as a means of liberation; enable the school community to take risks with its instructional practices, initiatives, and problems; and understand that no single truth exists as it relates to the school experiences of staff, students, and the school community (Taliaferro, 2011). Khalifa et al.'s (2016) Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) framework builds the necessary professional development, systems, and structures to shift the culture from a school-to-prison pipeline (punitive discipline) environment to the utilization of a method of support and restorative practices. Khalifa et al. conducted a review of the literature on CRSL that included 37 journal articles and eight books, ranging from 1989-2014. From these sources, the researchers were able to find the following four significant strands of CSRL: critical self-awareness; culturally responsive curricula and teacher preparation; culturally responsive and inclusive school environments; and engaging students and parents in community contexts. The first strand, critical self-awareness, has eight subsections, as shown in Table 2 (Khalifa et al., 2016). The following subsections include an overview of the research on the leadership behaviors in the critical self-awareness strand of the CRSL framework.

Is committed to continuous learning of cultural knowledge and context. The first CRSL behavior, commitment to continuous learning of cultural knowledge and context, is adapted from Gardiner and Enomoto's (2006) research article entitled: "Urban School Principals and Their Role as Multicultural Leaders." Gardiner and Enomoto conducted a cross-case analysis that examined school leaders' responses to diversity and their ability to demonstrate multicultural leadership. Six principals (two secondary school and four elementary school principals) from an urban school district were chosen to participate. The student population of the district is predominately White, with a small number of minority students and an English language learner (ELL) program that accommodated 56 different languages. The interviews with the six principals, who had very little multicultural training, focused on the following three critical multicultural leadership practices: fostering new meanings about diversity; promoting inclusive instructional practices within schools; and building connections between schools and communities (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006).

The findings indicated that the principals developed as multicultural leaders as diversity issues arose and through socialization with other principals. Gardiner and Enomoto (2006) suggest that principals should work with university faculty to examine educational laws and policies; audit curriculum to determine any bias and stereotyping that may exist; and connect research with instructional strategies. Furthermore, expectations for multiculturalism must be explicitly stated in mission statements and policies and supported by district leaders. Finally, school principals should reflect upon and critique their practices while taking into account their biases, background, traditions,

and values, which should lead principals to dedicate time to participating in professional development that would expand their knowledge of other cultures (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006).

Displays a critical consciousness on practice in and out of school; displays self-reflection. Urban schools with high populations of black and brown students who live in poverty often do not have the same resources as predominantly White schools. Furthermore, these schools tend to have large faculty turnover, subpar facilities, and a lack of parental and community support. Authoritarian leaders are often chosen to improve the schools' progress within two years. However, Gooden and Dantley (2012) argue that principals who lead with a dictatorial style and who have not received development training on the impact of race and equity on education will be unprepared to meet the challenge of school turnaround.

In response to the challenges of leading urban schools, Gooden and Dantley (2012) recommend that a leadership preparation program needs a framework centered on race and consisting of the following five essential components: a prophetic voice; self-reflection serving as the motivation for transformative action; a grounding in a critical theoretical construction; and a pragmatic edge that supports praxis and the inclusion of race language. Furthermore, leadership programs must prepare principals to not only critique and acknowledge inequity and social justice in education but to develop solutions. Through self-reflection, principals will develop a leadership philosophy that puts theory into practice and leads to motivation and the transformation of urban schools.

Principals must understand that their dispositions of race and racism have a direct impact on student achievement (Gooden & Dantley, 2012).

One model of a leader who displays a critical consciousness on practice in and out of school and who displays self-reflection is Gertrude Elise MacDougald Ayer. Ayer was the first African American principal in New York City during the 1930s to the 1940s. During her time as a school leader, Ayer was innovative and challenged the status quo by incorporating her students' cultural backgrounds into the curriculum. She collaborated with parents and the community. Moreover, she was an avid activist, who advocated for the hiring of more African American principals in New York. Ayers demonstrated how self-reflection leads to school transformation (Johnson, 2006).

Uses school data and indicants to measure CRSL. Equity audits will help teachers and administrators to reflect on the ideologies, practices, and policies that contribute to the achievement gap of black and brown students. Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, and Nolly (2004) developed equity audits to assist school administrators and teachers with analyzing data and discovering inequities in teacher quality, school programs, and student achievement. By examining and reflecting on inequities, school personnel will be able to develop solutions and applications that will change the mindsets and practices that contribute to the disparities (Skrla et al., 2004).

The researchers discuss two of their experiences with the equity audit process. In one experience, several school leaders and other stakeholders became defensive about the data and the implications of the inequitable practices. Despite the pushback, the data must be discussed and made public so that mindsets can shift and lead to changes in policies

and practices. In another experience, the researchers used equity audits in a principal preparation program. The students in the program were able to use the data to understand the inequities and implications in their schools. Equity audits can be an instrumental tool used for reflection but, most importantly, can be used to decrease the inequalities in public schooling (Skrla et al., 2004).

Uses parent/community voices to measure cultural responsiveness in schools.

Traditional district and community partnership approaches emphasize academic interventions and support for students. While schools may collaborate with parents and community organizations, it is the school that takes responsibility for the educational outcomes. Furthermore, parents, especially those of low-income black and brown students, are not always engaged as equal partners in the creation of policies and procedures. Parents are often viewed as hindrances to educational advancement. When a school or district fails to collaborate with parents as educational experts and change agents, inequitable systems and the marginalization of black and brown students may continue to exist (Ishimaru, 2014).

The Salem-Keizer Public School district uses a community organizing approach to collaborate with parents and community members. Salem-Keizer's community organizing approach stemmed from the vision of the superintendent to create shared responsibility and mutual accountability among all stakeholders. The community organizing model was mainly used to incorporate the voices of low-income Latino American students and their caregivers. Prior to the collaboration with the community-based parent organization, stakeholders viewed the district's ELL program as a drain on

the district's resources, parents were often mistreated, and students were not adequately provided with ELL services. The Salem-Keizer district engaged parents by working with a community-based organization to build the capacity of parents as educational leaders and change agents through workshops and ongoing collaboration efforts. The findings of Ishimaru's (2014) study indicates that when school districts collaborate with parents to build an environment in which there are mutual accountability and shared responsibility, greater trust will exist between schools, parents, and community organizations; school climates will become inclusive and equitable for all students; and, most importantly, student achievement will improve (Ishimaru, 2014).

In addition to building the capacity of parents and community members, Smyth (2006) argues that students' voices must be included in a school's or a district's efforts to reform. Incorporating students' voices is essential, given that a vast number of students are choosing not to complete high school. The decision of America's teenagers is rooted in their disconnection to our public school system. Smyth recommends that schools create an environment in which: students can take ownership of their education; students are treated with mutual trust and respect; students can connect with the curriculum; culturally responsive approaches are used; and students are welcomed and celebrated. The shift to a student-centered approach will require courageous and transformative leadership (Smyth, 2006).

Challenges whiteness and hegemonic epistemologies in school. Researchers Theoharis and Haddix (2011) conducted a qualitative study of six White urban school principals who were committed to reducing the achievement gap by creating equitable

schools for students of color. Furthermore, the researchers examined the impact of reflection and the personal commitment of White school leaders to dismantle White supremacist ideologies. This study is essential to educational leadership because a significant percentage of White school leaders work in urban schools. The findings discuss the following actions the leaders took to create equitable educational environments: personal development surrounding the issues of race; engaging in dialogues about race with staff members; providing and participating in staff development; infusing race into data-informed leadership; and connecting with families of color (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011).

The researchers first discovered that the principals in this study were committed to confronting their ideologies about race and institutional racism prior to becoming principals. Next, the researchers reveal that the school leaders discussed racial issues and biases with their staff members. Open dialogues were merely not enough, so several principals further engaged their staff in book studies, discussion groups, and other development activities. Furthermore, each school leader analyzed disaggregated racial data that included discipline and behavior referrals, special education referrals, ability tracking, and teacher performance and evaluation. Finally, each leader made a concerted effort to interact with, include, and communicate with families of color. In summary, the six school leaders explored in this study “recognize the powerful ways that race and racism shape and affect access to equity in schooling and can impede efforts toward closing the achievement gap” (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011, p. 1347). The researchers provide models of how White urban school leaders can engage in the fight for equity and

justice in public schools by challenging and changing racist school policies, practices, and ideologies (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011).

Uses equity audits to measure student inclusiveness, policy, and practice.

Despite the controversy and potential adverse effects of NCLB, it ushered in a new area of accountability policies. States, school districts, and local school leaders were held legally responsible to close the achievement gap. NCLB specifically required schools to disaggregate assessment results by race, poverty, disability, and English proficiency. In response to the NCLB requirements, Skrla et al. (2004) developed a tool, equity audits, to assist school leaders with linking the accountability policies to closing the achievement gap.

Equity audits are used as both a tool for reflection and to guide schools in achieving equity in civil rights, curriculum, and state accountability policies and systems. Skrla et al. (2004) developed a manageable way to review disaggregated data by grouping 12 indicators into the three different categories: teacher quality equity, programmatic equity, and achievement equity. Teacher quality equity, in combination with programmatic equity, will lead to achievement equity. Teacher quality equity examines the inequities of teacher quality and distribution at both a district and local school level. Indicators of teacher quality link student achievement to teacher performance and the distribution of teachers, according to performance ratings, seniority, and education level. Through teacher quality equity audits, schools may find that the students with the greatest need have the lowest percentage of teachers with advanced degrees (Skrla et al., 2004).

Programmatic equity audits examine the following key areas: special education, gifted and talented education, bilingual education, and student discipline. Through programmatic audits, schools will be able to determine “whether all student groups are represented in reasonably proportionate percentages (i.e., if 15% of students in a district are African American students, these same students ought to be close to 15% of G/T students)” (Skrla et al., 2004, p. 146). The final category for an equity audit is student achievement. Skrla et al. suggest that schools examine student achievement test results, dropout rates, high school graduation tracks, and SAT/ACT/Advanced Placement results. Similar to programmatic equity, the intent is to ascertain whether the student subgroups are reasonably represented in the achievement results. For example, an achievement audit will examine the percentage of low-income students taking Advanced Placement classes (Skrla et al., 2004).

Skrla et al. (2004) recommend that a committee of various stakeholders should be formed to review and discuss the disaggregated data. The committee should develop, implement, and monitor solutions. The challenge with equity audits is often a defensive response from the school or district leadership. However, equity audits are intended to analyze the data so that stakeholders can have transparent conversations and develop solutions to closing the achievement gap (Skrla et al., 2004).

Leading with courage. The school leaders profiled in Khalifa (2011) and in Maenette, Nee-Benham, and Cooper’s (1998) research exemplify the ability of school leaders to challenge the ethos of institutional marginalization in education courageously. In Khalifa’s (2011) study, one principal, an African American male, challenged low

teacher expectations and exclusionary practices that led to student disengagement. He was not afraid to confront and discuss teacher acquiescence to student disengagement. Similarly, Maenette et al.'s (1998) research describes the narrative of nine diverse women who are school leaders. Each of the women enhanced their leadership practice by reflecting on their personal experiences of marginalization to challenge inequitable systems in education. Through their compassion to serve children, the women were able to connect and build community in their schools.

Culturally relevant school leaders have a moral obligation to challenge the status quo and to develop a sense of connection and belongingness for students, particularly students of color (Khalifa, 2011; Maenette et al., 1998). Transforming traditional educational norms and power structures to meet the cultural needs of all students begins with the beliefs and practices of school leaders. The common culturally relevant leadership practices exhibited through the narratives and interviews of the principals in both studies represent a commitment to serving children, tenaciously tackling systemic issues and mindsets that lead to injustice and inequity, and self-reflection (Khalifa, 2011; Maenette et al., 1998). The educational leaders featured in the research modeled the principles and practices of social justice and culturally relevant leadership.

Is a transformative leader for social justice and inclusion. The final CRSL leadership behavior for critical self-reflection is transformative leadership for social justice and inclusion. According to Shields (2010):

Transformative leadership begins with questions of justice and democracy; it critiques inequitable practices and offers the promise not only of greater

individual achievement but of a better life lived in common with others.

Transformative leadership, therefore inextricably links education and educational leadership with the wider social context within which it is embedded. (p. 559)

In contrast to transformational leadership, which focuses on organizational change, transformative leadership is concerned with changing the inequities found in the policies and practices of wider society. Transformative leaders use critical reflection and analysis to address the power and privilege of the dominant culture and to create learning environments that are inclusive for all students. Transforming political landscapes, social contexts, and institutional systems will provide an equitable learning experience in which black and brown students will be successful in school and society (Shields, 2010).

Gooden's (2005) research provides an example of a transformative leader, Thomas Grant, who demonstrated his commitment to African American students by turning a failing high school around. Grant's transformative work was deeply rooted in the principles of social justice. For Grant, changing the trajectory for students meant changing his community (Gooden, 2005). Similarly, Alston's (2005) research discusses the leadership style of doubly marginalized female African American superintendents. Alston describes female African American superintendents not only as activists but as leaders who are willing to serve their schools and communities. Additional attributes of female African American superintendents include self-awareness, determination, and spirituality (Alston, 2005).

The leaders discussed in Alston's (2005), Gooden's (2005), and Shields' (2010) research have all experienced marginalization. Black and brown school leaders are a

minority in public education. Therefore, the majority of schools have White leaders. Gooden and O'Doherty's (2015) research suggests that leadership programs must address the impact of racism and the dominant culture on black and brown students. Through a reflective process, leaders can confront and challenge their beliefs and ideologies that may lead to unjust and inequitable practices in schools. Transformative leaders can critically self-reflect on their beliefs and practices, as well as critique institutional and political practices and ideologies. Critical self-reflection leads to action and activism that will result in discussions about inequitable practices, professional development, community organizing, and, ultimately, pedagogical and societal changes (Alston, 2005; Gooden, 2005; Shields, 2010).

Summary

Public schooling began as a way to educate and acclimate the influx of European immigrants coming to the United States in the later part of the 19th century. The early schools were not a priority of the federal government and thus were left to the jurisdiction of the states (Warren, 2001). During this time, public education was viewed as a key factor in promoting a democratic society and in the eradication of poverty (Raver, 1989; Warren, 2001). As United States citizens expressed outrage and sought change in public education, the federal government responded by increasing its role in public education. Through federal initiatives, such as the National School Lunch Act, the focus of the federal government shifted its sole focus from immigrant children to educating and feeding both citizens and immigrants (Geist Rutledge, 2015; USDA, 2017).

Despite the increased role of the federal government in public education, the public complained that schooling lacked innovative techniques that would prepare students to be global leaders. The public's outcry resulted in increased federal funding for innovation in math, science, and foreign language (Chopin, 2012; Kyle & Jenks, 2002). Additionally, the Civil Rights Movement and the historic *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* case initiated President Johnson's signing of the 1965 ESEA as a way to enforce the Supreme Court ruling by holding school districts accountable for integration and desegregation (Chopin, 2012; Nelson, 2016; Shoffner, 2016). However, research from two decades after the ESEA determined that students in the United States were academically behind other countries (Chopin, 2013; Nelson, 2016). As a result, a series of federal legislations (NCLB, RTT, and ESSA) were passed to essentially increase the federal government's role in public education by tying federal funding to school accountability. The most recent revision of the ESEA, the ESSA, has allowed for educational innovation, increased state flexibility, and a focus on equity (Chopin, 2013; Shoffner, 2016; U.S. Department, 2017f).

While the intent of increasing the federal government's role in public education was to improve academic outcomes, research shows that the federal government's response to gun violence through the Gun-Free School Act has resulted in a large number of black and brown students being suspended and excluded from school. Zero-tolerance policies and practices have forged an achievement gap and raised concerns of social justice and inequality for black and brown students (Dancy, 2014; Skiba et al., 2014; Wilson, 2013). Given the controversy surrounding the STPP, the government has revised

its response to school discipline by suggesting that schools and districts begin using interventions and alternatives to suspensions (CCRR, 2015).

Therefore, it is the work of superintendents and school leaders across the country to shift the culture of schools and school districts from punitive discipline to intervention and restorative-based approaches. One approach to building a restorative school community is to incorporate circle practices that originate from indigenous Native American tribes (Boyes-Watson & Pray, 2015; Pranis, 2005; Stutzman Amstutz & Mullet, 2015). Incorporating circles into a school community fosters positive relationships, supports the learning and development of students, and helps to build a positive school culture and climate (Stutzman Amstutz & Mullet, 2015).

CHAPTER III

OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine my impact, as superintendent of Johnson School, on addressing the STPP by implementing a plan to reduce out-of-school suspensions. Self-study was the methodology chosen for this research because it uses reflection to improve practice (Dinkelman, 2003). Furthermore, Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) describe self-study as a methodology “grounded in trustworthiness” and “invites the reader into the research process by asking that interpretations be checked” (p. 20). The design of self-study was created using LaBoskey’s (2004) five elements, which are: self-initiated and focused; improvement-aimed; interactive; multiple, primarily qualitative methods; and exemplar-based validation.

LaBoskey’s (2004) first element of self-study aim to transform practice. This study was designed to examine my practice and use my analysis of data to make immediate changes to my practice in order to improve student outcomes through the reduction of suspensions. The second element of self-study calls for interactions throughout the research process (LaBoskey, 2004). Collaborative interactions through the critical friend conversation occurred at the very end of the research study. Through this collaboration, I was able critically assess and challenge my own biases, values, and

practices to further my development as a leader. Furthermore, I collaborated with school leaders throughout my data collection and analysis process.

The third element of a self-study employs multiple, primarily qualitative methods. The data collection and analysis process included document analysis, a critical friend interview, and journal reflections. The qualitative method of open coding “provide[d] opportunities to gain different, and thus more comprehensive, perspectives on eliminating the STPP through a reduction of out-of-school suspensions” (LaBoskey, 2004). The fourth element requires a formal approach to making this research available to the profession for testing and judgment. The critical friend interview, coupled with the triangulation of data sources, established validity. Furthermore, the study's findings are detailed and connect the data, analysis, and understandings. This research is an example for other practitioners who are seeking to use critical self-reflection to improve their practice (LaBoskey, 2004). The final element of self-study requires a profound grounding and connection to theory, morality, ethicality, and political values and ideas. The entire design uses the CRSL framework, which has roots in social justice and critical theory.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are as follows:

Primary question:

- What is my role in shifting a school culture from a punitive based discipline structure to using researched based-interventions and restorative approaches to school discipline?

Secondary questions:

- What were my successes?
- What were my challenges and barriers to success?
- In what ways are my mindset and leadership practices impacted as I led change?

The primary question directly focuses on the theoretical framework for this study, Khalifa et al.'s (2016) CRSL. This framework is interwoven throughout the research project and is the basis for shifting the culture and challenging the beliefs of the faculty and staff to make a change in our disciplinary policy. Once the culture has been modified and everyone is provided job-embedded professional development, the school will be able to change and implement systems and structures that will provide a long-term approach to improving the out-of-school suspension issue. The secondary research questions helped me to ascertain the effectiveness of my efforts in reducing suspensions by examining my successes and my challenges. Most importantly, the secondary questions guided me in further developing as a leader.

Methodology

The methodology for this research is self-study, which is a reflective process that helps practitioners gain a deeper understanding of their craft (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Another description of self-study, according to Hamilton, Smith, and Worthington (2008), is “a look at self in action, usually within educational contexts” (p. 17). Given that my research is focused on my development as an educational leader, this methodology yielded me the opportunity to begin my superintendence, as suggested by

Kersten (2012), with focus on being a learner. Being a learner required me to critically reflect on my leadership by, as Dinkelman (2003) advises, conducting an “intentional and systematic inquiry” (p. 8) into my practice. Thus, I intersected theory, research, and practice to bring about my professional development as I became both a researcher and a participant in the study (Feldman, 2009; LaBoskey, 2004).

The intersection of theory, research, and practice transpired through the use of several methodological practices. LaBoskey (2004) refers to the practices as pedagogical because her research is geared toward classroom teachers who are conducting self-studies. I am conducting the study as a district leader, so I will refer to these practices as methodological. LaBoskey states

The pedagogical practices employed by self-study researchers are an integral part of the methodology of self-study because it is those efforts that we are investigating ...Furthermore, the pedagogies that are selected, constructed and adapted need to be context-sensitive and individually responsive, and they must be multiple, and variant. (p. 834)

The methodological practices used for this study include reflective inquiry, action research, and modeling. All three of these practices are intertwined and work collectively to create the design for this research, as shown in Figure 2. In fact, each methodological practice requires reflection and is geared toward improving practice (LaBoskey, 2004).

As part of this process, I analyzed my leadership skills and development by examining the following: my reflective journal entries, which included reflections from meetings and professional development workshops, and observations; meeting agendas

and notes; school policies and procedures; the school improvement plan; my critical friend interview; and other miscellaneous school documents. Furthermore, I reflected on all school-level data that mirror national data for suspensions and analyzed and reflected on the current disciplinary structure in which 43% of the student body was suspended at least once during the 2015-2016 school year (Indiana Department of Education, 2017a). Using the results my analysis and research-based best practices, I created and implemented a plan to address out-of-school suspensions.

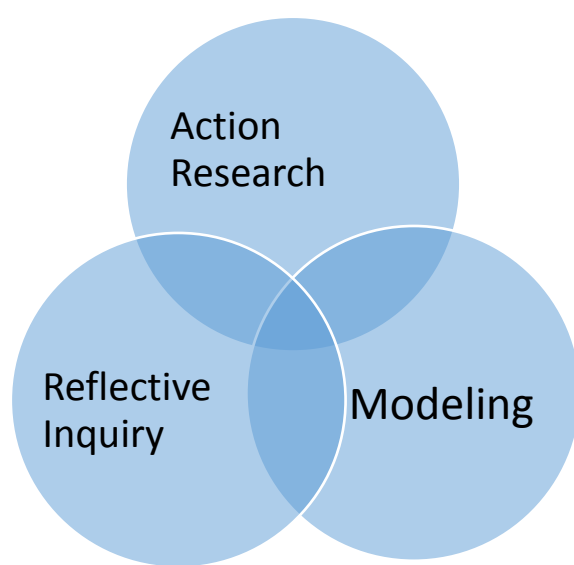


Figure 2. Intersection of Methodologies

Action Research

The primary methodological practice used in this study is action research, which has similar theoretical foundations and goals to self-study (LaBoskey, 2004). Action research, as defined by Stringer (2014), “is a collaborative approach to inquiry or investigation that provides people with the means to take systematic action to resolve specific problems” (p. 8). Samaras and Freese (2009) state that “[i]n both methodologies,

the researcher inquiries into problems situated in practices, engages in cycles of research, and systematically collects and analyzes data to improve practice” (p. 5). Throughout this process, I engaged in three action research cycles that required me to critically reflect on my leadership development and understand my role while addressing the punitive discipline issues at Johnson School.

The study was broken into three cyclical processes that consisted of the following stages: plan, act, develop, and reflect. The four stages of each cycle are a derivative of Stringer's (2014) Look, Think, and Act framework. Throughout the study, I used Khalifa et al.'s (2016) CRSL framework as a foundation for self-reflection and to challenge and assess my practices and beliefs as I engaged in the process of addressing punitive discipline. This thoughtful process began with a review of current student achievement data (test scores, attendance, suspension rates, graduation rates, etc.) and school documents (discipline policies and procedures). Next, I identified interventions that would reduce suspensions. Additionally, I reviewed the literature and best practices for reducing suspensions with the school leadership team. Reviewing the data, along with a series of reflective exercises, assisted me in creating a job-embedded professional development plan for myself and the school leaders (Leithwood, 2010). After creating the intervention plan, I began implementation and collected data to determine the focus of the next cycles. Table 6 outlines the first cycle of the self-study, and Table 7 outlines the second and third cycles of the study.

Table 6

Cycle 1 Timeline

Stage	Time Frame	Activity(ies)	Data Collection/Data Source
Plan	February	Review Data	Journal Reflections and Document Analysis
		Review Research/Literature	
		Discuss CRSL Framework	
		Identify problem	
Develop	Mid- to Late Feb.	Create Plan	Journal Reflections
Act	March	Implement Plan	Journal Reflections and Observation Notes
Reflect	Late March	Compile and Review Data	Critical Friend Interview

Table 7

Cycle 2 and 3 Timelines

Stage	Cycle 2	Cycle 3	Activity(ies)	Data Collection/Data Source
Plan	Late March to Early April	Late April to Early May	Review Data from Previous Cycle	Journal Reflections and Document Analysis
Develop	Early April	Early May	Revise Plan	Journal Reflections
Act	April (Week 2)	May (Week 2)	Implement Revisions	Journal Reflections and Observation Notes
Reflect	Late April/Early May	Late May/Early June	Compile and Review Data	Critical Friend Interview

First stage. The first stage of the cycle is the plan phase. The plan phase is similar to Stringer's (2014) Look phase. According to Stringer:

The primary objective of the Look phase of the process is to gather information that enables researchers to extend their understanding of the experiences and perspective of stakeholders-those mainly affected by or having an influence on the issue investigated. (p. 101)

During the first segment of the plan phase, I focused on Kersten's (2012) strategy of being a learner by seeking to understand more about the school, discipline practices, and key stakeholders. I reviewed the school's data and discipline policies and practices. Furthermore, I began to ask questions to seek clarity and understand the problem from various stakeholder viewpoints that included students, teachers, non-instructional staff

members, board members, and parents. Simultaneous to learning more about the problem and its context, I continued building and establishing relationships, as encouraged by Kersten, with the school's leadership team, consisting of the principal, two assistant principals, dean of students, and director of student supports. The strategies I used to build relationships with the leadership team consisted of both formal and informal meetings done within the context of the school setting.

Additionally, I implemented the following strategies from Tschannen-Moran's (2014), *Trust Matters: Leadership for Successful Schools*. The authors state that trustworthy leaders

- put the culture of trust ahead of their own ego needs;
- foster the development of trust in their school by demonstrating flexibility, adopting a problem-solving stance, refusing to play the blame game, and involving teachers in making important decisions;
- strike the right balance between taking too much responsibility and taking too little, between pushing too hard and pushing too little. Taking a strengths-based approach to school-wide conversations about rebuilding trust is likely to be more constructive than rehashing old conflicts and betrayals in a public forum. (p. 268)

My interactions and experiences during the plan phase were documented in my reflective journal and used as a data source for this study.

The next segment of the plan phase focused strictly on document and data analysis. The documents that were analyzed were the school's policies and procedures related to

discipline, including: the student handbook, teacher handbook, student code of conduct, and discipline policy. Additional data analyzed during this phase were discipline referrals and suspensions for the current school year and the past 2 school years. I used a document analysis protocol (found in Appendix C) to analyze the documents. Furthermore, I recorded my thoughts and reflections in my reflective journal (see Appendix A for journal reflection prompts).

Second stage. The second stage of the cycle was the development phase. During the development phase, I analyzed the first two stages of the process and developed a plan to reduce suspensions. The development phase included aspects of Stringer's (2014) Think and Act phases. Similar to the Think phase, I made meaning of the data that I collected through critical reflection and reflective inquiry (Stringer, 2014; Schwandt, 2007). Reflective inquiry is a form of reflexivity, which, according to Schwandt:

is used in a methodological sense to refer to the process of critical self-reflection on one's biases, theoretical predispositions, preferences, and so forth. This kind of self-inspection can be salutary for any kinds of inquiry...Hence, reflexivity can be a means for critically inspecting the entire research process. (p. 260)

LaBoskey (2004) describes self-study researchers as being "both actors and spectators who act and think about educational questions" (p. 820). Acting as both a researcher and a subject of the research, I critically reflected on my practices throughout the study.

Almost simultaneous with critical reflection, I conducted an in-depth dive into the data. This analysis clarified my role in leading the efforts to address the STPP by reducing out-of-school suspensions at Johnson School. An analysis of Johnson's data and

current disciplinary policies and procedures, which mirror the national suspension rate, indicated that there is an issue of social justice, particularly for African American male students who are suspended three to four times more than their White, Asian, or Latino peers (Cramer et al., 2011; CCRR Rights, 2015; Indiana Department of Education, 2017a). Challenging and changing Johnson's policies and procedures that contribute to the STPP entailed using foundational aspects of critical research during my reflective inquiry.

Merriam (2009) describes critical research as "a broad term that covers a number of orientations to research, all of which seek to understand what's is going on, but also to critique the way things are in the hopes of bring about a more just society" (p. 35). Therefore, using aspects of the critical research during my reflective inquiry was an appropriate practice for this research project because self-study is rooted in social justice and has a keen focus on benefiting students (LaBoskey, 2004). During Cycle 3, I evaluated the current disciplinary procedures and policies of Johnson School and created a plan to address the usage of punitive discipline as a primary consequence for student infractions.

Creating a plan is synonymous with constructing action plans in Stringer's (2014) Act phase. During this period, an action plan was designed with a series of steps that helped to achieve the goal of the study. An objective of this study was to study my leadership abilities as I sought to impact the leadership team of Johnson School by providing professional development, coaching, and support to implement, with fidelity,

restorative practices. Cutting out-of-school suspensions using restorative practices and responses will have a direct impact on the STPP (Wilson, 2014).

Third stage. The third stage of each cycle was the Act phase. Throughout this phase, I documented my thoughts and perceptions in my reflective journal. A reduction of out-of-school suspensions is an effort that must be executed by the leadership team of Johnson. As the superintendent, my role is to facilitate the creation of the district's vision for school discipline with stakeholders and to ensure the success of the vision by providing resources and guidance (Kersten, 2012). During this phase, I modeled restorative practices (LaBoskey, 2014). LaBoskey describes modeling as “practicing what we preach” or “walking our talk” (p. 839). Therefore, I not only supervised the implementation of the plan, I also became an active participant and modeled the expectations that were established. Given my role, an examination of my relationship and ability to provide support and a model to the school leaders, faculty, and the staff was essential.

As I reflected on my leadership skills and capabilities, I began to critically investigate my relationship with those I supervised. This was important because the responsibility of the school-based leadership team is to implement the plan to reduce suspensions with fidelity. Self-study, according to Bullough and Pinnegar (2001), “points to a simple truth, that to study a practice is simultaneous to study self: a study of self-in-relation to other” (p. 14). Therefore, it was essential to study how I related to the staff because a less than favorable relationship with the school-based team had the potential to

result in an unsuccessful implementation of a plan. To document the third phase, I discussed my observations in my reflective journal.

Fourth stage. The fourth and final stage of each cycle was the reflect stage. During the reflect stage, I reviewed and analyzed the data collected from the previous three stages. My reflection assisted me in determining the next steps for the study. Similar to the other stages, my reflections were documented in my journal to be used as a data source.

To help remove bias and to push me to gain a deeper understanding of my role and development as a leader, I engaged in a semi-structured critical friend interview at the end of the study (LaBoskey, 2014). Herr and Anderson (2005) define a critical friend as an independent person "who can help them problematize the taken-for-granted aspects of their setting" (p. 30). Furthermore, Herr and Anderson state that

bias and subjectivity are natural and acceptable in action research as long as they are critically examined rather than ignored, other mechanisms may need to be put in place to ensure that they do not have a distorting effect on outcomes. (p. 60)

Given this, I chose a critical friend who is both a colleague and a trusted friend. My critical friend provides Johnson with special education support throughout the school year, both onsite and remotely. Since she has an inside view but is not on campus on a regular basis, she assisted me in reflecting on each cycle.

Follow-up cycles. After I analyzed the data from the first cycle, I created a very similar plan for the second and third cycles (timelines for Cycle 2 and 3 are in Table 7). Both the second and third cycles included the four stages that were part of the first cycle.

Reflective inquiry and modeling were interwoven in each cycle. The data from all three cycles were analyzed and the findings are reported in Chapter IV of this study. More information on the data analysis will be given in the Data Gathering and Analysis section.

Setting

The setting for this research was Johnson School, which is located in the Midwest. Johnson School serves approximately 500 students in Grades 7-12. At Johnson School, 97% of students are African American, and 93% qualify for free and reduced-price lunch. Johnson School is considered a one school district according to the state board of education. However, there is an agreement with Adams Corporation and Rogers City to operate the school under a contract with the state. At the time of this study, Johnson had completed five years as a turnaround school with Adams Corporation, and the state just renewed another five-year contract with Adams and Rogers City to collaboratively operate the school.

Prior to the current contract, Adams Corporation reported directly to the state and handled the academic program, while the Rogers City School Board (RCSB) owned and maintained the physical building. Adams and the RCSB have a strained relationship because the RCSB has a history of financial challenges. As a result of the financial challenges, the RCSB has been unable to properly maintain building. The lack of maintenance of the boilers has resulted in no heat or hot water during the frigid winter months. The current contract, differing from the previous contract, requires greater collaboration and a larger financial commitment from the RCSB. However, the state has

assigned an emergency manager to operate the district, thereby removing the authority of the superintendent and the school board.

Similar to the school board, Rogers City is facing some major financial issues that steep from the closing of the city's major steel mills, which accounted for a significant number of jobs and amount of revenue. The closing of the mills has resulted in 37% of residents living in poverty, with an average household income of approximately \$28,000 (United States, 2016). While driving through Rogers City, one finds many closed school buildings, vacant lots, and deteriorating structures. Johnson has a historical significance in the city because it was the only school African Americans were allowed to attend in the 1920s. Given the significance of the school, the alumni are extremely active and dedicated to keeping Johnson an option for students of Rogers to attend.

Prior to the state assigning Adams to turn the school's performance around, Johnson had been rated as a failing school by the Indiana Department of Education. Adams has worked very diligently to improve student achievement. The results of the achievement includes increases in student attendance, graduation rates and college matriculation and a decrease in out-of-school suspensions. However, the school's grade remained an F for the first five years of the contract and then advanced to a D (Indiana Department, 2017a). While out-of-school suspensions at Johnson have decreased over time, the rate of suspensions is significantly higher than the state's. Johnson relies heavily on a system that uses punitive discipline that results in students being excluded from school.

Data Collection

Table 8 provides a breakdown of the data collection as aligned with the research questions. To answer each of the research questions, the data that were collected consisted of reflective journal entries, document analysis, and the final critical friend interview. The document analysis consisted of: meeting agendas and notes, the school's disciplinary policies and procedures, and other miscellaneous public documents related to school discipline (i.e., the school improvement plan). A description of the collection of each data source is presented in subsequent subsections.

Journal Reflections

The purpose of the journal reflections is to promote a high level of reflexivity that is needed to advance my practice (LaBoskey, 2004). Reflexivity, according to Merriam (2009), is “the process of critical self-reflection on one's biases, theoretical predispositions, preferences, and so forth” (p. 260). Throughout the research study, I captured my reflections by responding to a set of predetermined open-ended journal prompts. The goal was to complete at least one journal entry per week. This journal was very similar to field journals that qualitative researchers use to document their experiences and thoughts about the methodology (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, my observations and reflections of data meetings, school board meetings, student interactions, faculty and staff interactions, observations, and my self-reflections were captured in my reflective journal. In addition to the journal being a critical piece of reflective data, it established validity by creating a deeper understanding of the social reality (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

Table 8

Data Collection Plan

Research Question	Data Source	Data Source	Data Source
Primary Question: What is my role in shifting a school culture from using a punitive-based disciplinary structure to using researched-based interventions and restorative approaches to school discipline?	Journal Reflections	Document Analysis (Meeting Agendas and Notes, and Disciplinary Policies and Procedures)	Critical Friend Interview
Secondary Question: In what ways were my mindset and leadership practices impacted as I led change?	Journal Reflections	Document Analysis (Meeting Agendas and Notes, and Disciplinary Policies and Procedures)	Critical Friend Interview
Secondary Question: What were my successes?	Journal Reflections	Document Analysis (Meeting Agendas and Notes, and Disciplinary Policies and Procedures)	Critical Friend Interview
Secondary Question: What were my challenges and/or barriers to success?	Journal Reflections	Document Analysis (Meeting Agendas and Notes, and Disciplinary Policies and Procedures)	Critical Friend Interview

Document Analysis

In addition to the reflective journal, I analyzed various documents. Merriam (2009) defines public records as “the official, ongoing records of a society’s activities”

(p. 140). These public documents, mainly available through the school or state website, included the school's code of conduct, student handbook, teacher evaluation plan, discipline data, and school improvement plan. While these documents have been prepared independently of this study, the documents were used as a source of data to provide insight into the school's disciplinary policies and practices. The second set of documents was researcher-generated. According to Merriam:

Researcher-generated documents are documents prepared by the researcher or for the researcher by participants after the study has begun. The specific purpose of generating documents is to learn more about the situation, person or event being investigated. (p.149)

The documents, created in alignment with my job responsibilities, included written communications and reports to stakeholders, presentations, and meeting agendas and notes. The communications and reports to stakeholders are generated on a monthly basis and are used for the school and state board meetings.

Critical Friend Interview

In addition to my journal reflections and documents, another form of data collection was the transcript of my critical friend interview. Herr and Anderson (2005) state, "most action researchers also seek independent critical friends who can help them problematize the taken-for-granted aspects of their setting interviews" (p. 30). For this research project, I used one critical friend, an insider to Johnson School. My critical friend has an inside perspective because she primarily provides Johnson with special education support. Since she has an inside perspective but is not on campus on a regular

basis, she was able to assist me, through a semi-structured interview, in challenging my biases and practices.

Critical friends, according to Herr and Anderson (2005), are “devil’s advocate for alternative explanations of research data” (p. 57). My critical friend pushed me to have a deeper understanding of the data and my leadership practices by collaboratively helping me to make meaning of my research. My critical friend was my reflective partner, who assisted me in understanding my role, successes, and challenges. The reflective dialogue supported me in challenging myself as a researcher as I acknowledged my misconceptions and biases.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process, adapted from Herr and Anderson (2005), took place throughout the data collection process. The process consisted of initial meaning making, and then a second analysis was used to develop a holistic approach to understanding the data (Herr & Anderson, 2005). During the initial meaning-making phase, the data were analyzed and used to determine the next steps for the implementation of the intervention throughout each phase of the action research cycle. At the end of the third and final action research cycle, all of the data were revisited and analyzed to answer the research questions. During the second phase of the data analysis, all the data gathered and analyzed during the first data analysis phase were categorized and coded to the critical self-awareness strand of the CRSL conceptual framework. Table 9 lists the leadership behaviors of the critical self-awareness strand CRSL framework.

Table 9

CRSL Critical Self Awareness

Is committed to continuous learning of cultural knowledge and contexts
Displays a critical consciousness on practice in and out of school; displays self-reflection
Uses school data and indicants to measure CRSL
Uses parent/community voices to measure cultural responsiveness in schools
Uses equity audits to measure student inclusiveness, policy, and practice
Challenges Whiteness and hegemonic epistemologies in school
Leading with courage
Is a transformative leader of social justice and inclusion

Source: Khalifa et al., 2016.

Validity

LaBoskey (2004) describes that the validity of self-study research is achieved through trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is used, rather than validity, due to the inquiry-guided nature of the self-study methodology. Merriam (2009) defines trustworthiness as “quality of an investigation (and its findings) that made it note-worthy to audiences” (p. 299). Bullough and Pinnegar’s (2001) research states that:

Self-study invites the reader into the research process by asking that interpretations be checked, that themes be critically scrutinized, and that the "so what" question be vigorously pressed. In self-studies, conclusions are hard won,

elusive, are more tentative than not. The aim of self-study research is to provoke, challenge, and illuminate rather than confirm and settle. (p. 20)

To promote trustworthiness, I triangulated my journal reflections, document analysis, and critical friend interview. Table 8 shows the data collection points as aligned to the research questions. Triangulation, according to Merriam (2009), “uses multiple pieces of data... as a means of checking the integrity of the inferences one draws” (p. 216). The central point of the triangulation was examining a conclusion (assertion, claim, etc.) from more than one vantage point.

Another way in which I promoted trustworthiness was through the use of critical friend interview. The critical friend interview provided me with a perspective that was separate from my own, and it challenged my assumptions, biases, and interpretations (LaBoskey, 2004). Furthermore, LaBoskey states that: “we must make visible our data, our methods for transforming the data into findings, and the linkages between data, findings, and interpretations” (p. 853). The findings of the data analysis were reported in a narrative format with detailed descriptions of the analysis process that led to the conclusions. A detailed description, triangulation, and critical friend interview will establish validity so that research practitioners can use this study to inform their practice or future research.

Limitations

While action research has commonalities with both quantitative and qualitative analysis, it differs in that the participants of the study are in control of the research (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Placing the participants in charge of the research design and

methodology puts some limitations on the study itself. As a participant and researcher, my limitations include my ability to promote change while not abusing my power as superintendent. As an educator, both a teacher and administrator, the majority of my experience has been in the Midwest working with populations of students in public schools who are majority African American and of a low socioeconomic status. Each school I have worked with has been faced with a significant number of students who have behavioral, academic, and social challenges. The educational results and district ratings of each school differed. While this gives me context and background knowledge to work with school communities that face challenges, similar to Johnson School, it limits the scope of this study. Therefore, the results of this study may not be applicable to schools with: a small demographic of African American students; a percentage of students who do not qualify for free and reduced-price lunch; a location in a rural area; a geographic location outside of the Midwest.

Additional limitations of action research are the context of the study. According to Stringer (2014):

Action research seeks to enact an approach to inquiry that includes all relevant stakeholders in the process of investigation. It creates a context that enables diverse groups to negotiate their agendas in an atmosphere of mutual trust and acceptance to work toward practical solutions to problems that concern them. (p.

31)

This study focuses solely on my agenda as superintendent of Johnson School. While this plan may be similar to that of other schools, I am driving the process and creating

interventions that meet the needs of the school. Therefore, the interventions for this study may not work in other schools, even if the demographics of the students are similar.

Summary

This self-study examines my role as the superintendent of Johnson School and my development as a leader as I sought to reduce out-of-school suspensions. Johnson's out-of-school suspension rate is significantly higher than that of the state, so lowering suspensions through a systematic approach of researched-based interventions is a top priority during my first year as the superintendent of Johnson (Indiana Department of Education, 2017a). This study provided a structured way for me to utilize a methodology within the context of my current work setting and provided insight as I implemented solutions to reduce suspensions (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001).

The design of this self-study is based on LaBoskey's (2004) five elements. Additionally, the intersection of action research, reflective inquiry, and modeling was collectively used to develop the process and timelines used to collect and analyze the data. This methodology guided me in understanding my responsibility, as superintendent, of ensuring that Johnson school meets federal and state requirements and successfully preparing students for college and careers. Furthermore, I was able to analyze the development of my leadership abilities by looking at the successes and challenges as I implemented a plan to reduce suspensions. The reflective nature of the study supported me in learning more about my role and development as a superintendent.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the self-study in my role and responsibilities as superintendent to reduce out-of-school suspensions at Johnson School. Reducing the out-of-school suspension rate at Johnson School was essential during my first year as superintendent because Johnson was violating the rights of special education students through excessive exclusionary practices, and Johnson's suspension rate was significantly higher than the state's (Indiana Department, 2017a). Furthermore, research shows that exclusionary disciplinary practices have a direct impact on students' academic achievement and is an issue of social justice and inequality for black and brown students (Skiba et al., 2014). Since the role of the superintendent includes advancing student achievement, overseeing district operations, and ensuring district compliance with federal and state mandates, addressing the STPP is essential to Johnson School's continuous improvement (Kersten, 2012).

Through this self-study, I examined my approach in reducing out-of-school suspensions and reflected on my leadership style, skills, and abilities. Through critical self-reflection, I learned more about my strengths and the areas in which I needed to further develop as a leader. As a consequence of the cyclical process and critical self-reflection, I gained a deeper understanding of the STPP (Merriam, 2009). Most

importantly, by conducting action research, I was able to change my leadership practices so that I could more effectively address the exclusionary disciplinary practices at Johnson School (Stringer, 2014).

Organization of the Study's Findings

The findings of this study are presented in response to the research questions. In the attempt to answer the research questions, I used Dedoose to code and analyze the data collected from this study according to the CRSL framework (Khalifa et al., 2016). The CRSL framework was used to investigate and analyze the findings because its foundational research is deeply rooted in social justice, culturally relevant teaching, culturally responsive pedagogy, and critical self-reflection. Moreover, the CRSL framework, according to Khalifa et al., “serves as an impetus for school leaders to constantly challenge their own inadvertent, or even acknowledged, oppressive understandings and performatives” (p. 1296). Consequently, coding the data led to a deep level of critical reflection that has propelled the transformation of my practice.

Research Questions

Primary question:

- What is my role in shifting a school culture from a punitive based discipline structure to using researched based-interventions and restorative approaches to school discipline?

Secondary questions:

- What were my successes?
- What were my challenges and barriers to success?

- In what ways are my mindset and leadership practices impacted as I led change?

Methodology Summary

Action research and self-study enabled me to become a research practitioner by integrating theory and research into the context of my work as a superintendent of Johnson School (Feldman, 2009; LaBoskey, 2004). Action research and self-study were chosen because critical self-reflection is a key component of the design. Furthermore, the design of this study intersected action research, reflective inquiry, and modeling. The intersection of the three methodologies empowered me to improve my practice through reflection (LaBoskey, 2004). Critical research and reflection were essential in addressing the STTP because both are conducive to yielding change and social justice (Merriam, 2009).

The duration of this study lasted through the second half of the 2017-2018 academic calendar, which began the last week of January 2018 and commenced on June 30, 2018. During this time frame, I conducted three action research cycles and implemented three interventions: (a) data meetings, (b) professional development, and (c) peace circles. The data collected consisted of journal entries, a critical friend interview, and a review of documents (meeting agendas, school improvement plan, and disciplinary policies and procedures). To examine my role and effectiveness in reducing out-of-school suspensions, the data were coded and analyzed using the critical self-awareness behaviors of Khalifa et al.'s (2016) CRSI framework.

The structure of the study used a four-stage cyclical process that consisted of planning, developing, acting, and reflecting. During the planning stage, I reviewed Johnson's suspension data and research related to the STTP. Then, I set goals. In the next stage, I developed a plan to implement an intervention that would address the exclusionary disciplinary issues. Once my plan was developed, I implemented the chosen intervention during the act phase. During the act phase, I was able to model the intervention for Johnson's leadership team as well as monitor the progress of the intervention. Finally, I reflected on the cycle by compiling and reviewing the data I collected. The data were obtained through a series of reflective exercises that included journaling, a critical friend interview, and document analysis. At the conclusion of the third cycle, I coded the data to the CRSL framework and then triangulated the findings to promote trustworthiness and validity (LaBoskey, 2004).

Findings

Research Question One

What is my role in shifting a school culture from using a punitive-based disciplinary structure to using researched-based interventions and restorative approaches to school discipline?

To determine my role in shifting Johnson School from using a punitive-based disciplinary system to a more restorative- and intervention-based approach, I analyzed and triangulated my reflective journal entries, critical friend interview, and various school documents. Through my investigation, the theme of leadership surfaced in multiple facets. First, I guided the school-based leadership team in modifying the school's

disciplinary policies and procedures. While planning to implement my first intervention for this study, I discovered that the new policies and procedures were not implemented with fidelity. Therefore, my first intervention was to institute data meetings with the leadership team. After completing a cycle of data meetings, I decided to add a series of professional learning experiences. During my final planning phase for the last cycle of the study, I determined that peace circles would be the most appropriate intervention.

Prior to implementing the first intervention of this study, I reviewed Johnson School's disciplinary policies and procedures, which were made under my direction before the beginning of the study. The policies are relevant to this study because they were foundational to the interventions that I used to address Johnson's exclusionary disciplinary practices. During my final document analysis phase, leadership surfaced as a common theme. Through my role as superintendent, I led the efforts to amend and revise the school's disciplinary policies and procedures to become more inclusive of restorative- and intervention-based disciplinary practices.

The first policy that was amended, in August of 2017, was the student code of conduct (SCC). As noted in my reflective journal, the SCC was first policy to alter because Johnson was contractually obligated to adopt the same SCC as the Rogers City School District. Despite our contractual obligation to change the SCC, several leadership team members thought that transitioning to a new SCC would be detrimental to the school's culture and climate. I, on the other hand, knew that if implemented with fidelity, the new SCC would minimize out-of-school suspensions and require the school leaders to

use restorative practices (peace circles, conferences, peer jury). After much discussion, as noted in my reflective journal, we transitioned to the new SCC.

As I reviewed the new SCC with the leadership team, we noticed that the school's disciplinary matrix needed revision. The old disciplinary matrix was organized into three categories of student behavior offenses, and suspension was the primary consequence for student infractions. In the revised 2017-2018 behavior matrix, instructive, corrective, and restorative responses were added as consequences to level 1 infractions. Despite adopting a new SCC and revising the discipline matrix, the student handbook remained the same because it had already been printed. However, in the 2018-2019 student handbook, community service was listed as an alternative to suspension, which is a significant move in the right direction.

The final document created during my first year as superintendent was the school improvement plan. In October 2017, the state's Department of Education notified me that Johnson School was required, for the first time, to create a school improvement plan. After receiving notice, I collaborated with the leadership team to draft the improvement plan. The improvement plan, which was approved by the Johnson School Board, specifically listed restorative justice and peace circles as interventions and strategies as part of the action plan. The improvement plan, SCC, and disciplinary matrix were revised to address Johnson's ongoing issues with suspensions. More importantly, the revised policies and procedures addressed Johnson's institutional issues of equity and social justice.

While the major school policies and procedures were changed to reflect a more restorative and intervention-based approach to discipline, I noticed during my first cycle of data review that the disciplinary practices remained the same. As I reviewed the written documentation of student behavioral infractions logged in the student information system, I observed that restorative practices were not being used, and suspensions were still the primary consequence for student discipline. In my February 12, 2018, journal entry, I wrote: “I need to continue pushing the team to use alternative methods for suspension.” Therefore, my first intervention was to meet with the leadership team to discuss the student discipline data and to set goals. The following is an excerpt from my February 23, 2018, journal entry:

For the first cycle, the intervention will be to meet with the leadership team weekly. During our weekly meetings, we will review the suspension data on three levels (school level, classroom/teacher level, and the individual student level).

The goal of reviewing the data will be to point out the positive trends in the data, identify trends that are areas of concern, and create an action plan to address the trends. The action plan will be geared toward implementing interventions that are either aligned with PBIS, restorative discipline practices or aligned with MTSS (multi-tiered intervention and supports).

Meeting with the team was a way for me to set clear expectations for student discipline. In addition to meeting with the leadership team, I decided to continue to review and discuss the discipline data and our progress toward our goals in the school board

meetings. Furthermore, the data meetings served as a way for me to monitor the use of exclusionary discipline.

Prior to the data meetings, I would review the student behavioral infractions that were documented in the student information system. I also would discuss the number of suspensions and referrals with the data analysis and our special education support director from Adams Corporation. Examining the data with my colleagues from Adams Corporation was a way to brainstorm and determine some of the root causes of the high number of suspensions. I noted in my journal that one of the concerns from the special education support person was that the leadership team was unaware of the manifestation of determination procedures. Furthermore, I was concerned that just having systems in place was not enough support for the leadership team. Therefore, in the second cycle of the research project, I decided to add professional development.

Professional development was a way for me to provide support to the leaders. In my February 23, 2018, journal I wrote:

Another important part of the weekly meetings will be job embedded professional development. What I plan to do is to find an article, video clip, or other professional/ research-based source that will address or educate the team on an area of concern. The plan is for us to either implement a strategy from this resource or have it to use in our toolkit as we have followed up and action items. Embedding professional development into our leadership team meetings was a way to ensure that the leaders were provided with support without having to leave the building. We were able to hold a few workshops that were embedded into the leadership team

meetings. One workshop was led by our special education support person. She went through the manifestation determination process. On another occasion, we invited an outside vendor to review restorative practices and their social–emotional learning curriculum.

In addition to adding professional development to our current leadership team meetings, I organized a four-day peace circle training session that was outside of our regular team meetings. Seven faculty members joined me in attending the professional development. I felt it important for me to participate in the training with the team because it set a precedent that the training was important. In addition to the peace circle training, I contracted with an outside organization to conduct two days of training in the building on restorative disciplinary practices. During this training, all but one of the leadership team members were present.

During the final cycle of the research project, I decided to add peace circles as an intervention. Peace circles not only supported the leaders in their transition from using punitive to using restorative discipline, but it was also a way for me to model expectations. I walked away from the peace circle training feeling refreshed and hopeful that peace circles would be a way for us to build relationships with students and a way to teach them to solve problems. In my April 2, 2018, journal entry, I wrote: “Given that several of us have attended peace circle training. I know that this would be a good tool to start using to help decrease suspensions by giving students a voice.” More importantly, after the peace circle training, I had a clear understanding of how peace circles would be beneficial to reducing the out-of-school suspensions at Johnson.

I was so excited to introduce peace circles to Johnson. In my April 2, 2018, journal entry, I wrote:

In the next cycle, I will start to incorporate peace circles in the school community. First, I will commit to having a weekly peace circle with the leadership team. I think this is important because it will give me an opportunity to model peace circles for the leadership team. Those members of the leadership team who did not get an opportunity to experience peace circles through the training will now be able to experience the peace circles. It will also be used a way for me to continue to build trust and build relationships with the leadership team. Secondly, I am going to encourage the 6 team members who attended peace circle training to start the implementation of peace circles throughout the building. While my goal is to get the entire school using peace circles next school year, this will be a great way to end the year and help shift the climate.

Peace circles were not only a way for me to address the suspension problem, but it was also a means of building relationships, discussing discipline, embedding professional learning, and, most importantly, a way for me to model restorative practices. By implementing weekly peace circles for the leadership team, I was supporting their development so that they could begin to facilitate peace circles for students, faculty, and staff members. Restorative practices were essential this to become a school-wide initiative with buy-in from the leadership team. I knew that if the leaders experienced peace circles, they would understand the benefits. In my May 2, 2018, journal entry, I wrote:

This week during our leadership team's peace circle, I shared an article I found while doing research on restorative justice. This is a different approach than what I have been doing. The circles up to this point have been to build relationships and to check-in. Now I am going to use the circle format as a way to share information and educate the leadership team on the circle process and restorative justice. So, I will begin to use articles and other readings as a means of professional development for the leadership team.

Once the leaders experienced the relationship and consensus-building power of peace circles, I began to embed professional articles on restorative practices into our peace circles. Thus, peace circles supported the professional development of our leaders.

In addition to implementing restorative practices and supporting the school leaders through peace circles, I also modeled restorative conversations and used community service as an alternative to suspension. In my May 31, 2018, journal entry, I discuss a restorative conversation that included the principal and the dean of students.

The journal entry from May 31, 2018, is as follows:

I was able to model a restorative conversation for the dean and the principal today. I actually felt good about the conversation because it was apparent that this student was dealing with some major trauma that affected his interactions with some staff members...I felt good about the conversation because I was able to connect with the student. Myself, the dean of students, the principal, and the student's advocate was able to get to the root cause of the student's behavior that had nothing to do with the school. Toward the end of the conversation, I modeled

the restorative part which was getting the student to verbalize how he could repair the harm that had been done.

I was genuinely excited to encounter the perfect opportunity to engage in a restorative practice in addition to the circles. The restorative conversation was the perfect opportunity to support a traumatized student and to begin a plan to reintegrate the student back into the school community. Another example of engaging in a restorative practice occurred with some senior students who initiated a water fight at the end of the year. Rather than restricting their graduation participation, I required the students to perform community service and then formally apologize to the faculty and staff. My final way of supporting and modeling restorative practices was conducting a final round of peace circles with the teachers.

In my critical friend interview, I wrote the following:

As a final round of peace circles, I conducted peace circles with the staff. Being able to do peace circles with all of the staff, all of the teachers, it helped to open them up and to see this is what restorative justice is like... it opens their mind up to say, "Okay, this is what restorative justice is about." It's about building relationships. It's about intervention. It's about repairing harm.

My concluding peace circle with the faculty and staff introduced circle practices for the upcoming school year. I planned and co-kept the circles with the faculty members who attended the peace circle training with me a few months ago. Co-keeping the circles was a way to reinforce the training the circle keepers attended, and it was an additional opportunity for me to collaborate with faculty. The overall experience provided insight

and helped me to build bonds with our teachers. Additionally, the circles were an opportunity for the teachers to experience a restorative practice that could be used in their classrooms.

In addressing the STTP and exclusionary disciplinary issues at Johnson School, I first collaborated with the leadership team and the school board to change the disciplinary policies and procedures. I also led the efforts to establish the school's first school improvement plan, which set school-wide goals and incorporated restorative practices. Next, I provided support to the Johnson School leadership team (principal, assistant principals, dean of students, and the director of special education) through a review of the data, professional development, and modeling. The findings from my data analysis showed that my role as superintendent was to provide leadership to shift the school culture from using punitive discipline to a system that uses restorative practices and interventions. I was addressing an issue of social justice and inequality, and I challenged and changed practices and policies, so my leadership was transformative and courageous (Khalifa et al., 2016). The secondary questions provide more insight into the transformative and courageous acts and attributes of my leadership.

Research Question Two

What were my successes? Through an analysis of my journal entries, critical friend interview, and review of documents, I identified the successful actions that I took to begin converting Johnson School from using punitive-based discipline to using restorative approaches. The significant successes were implementing the new disciplinary policies and school improvement plan; the leadership team peace circles; and the

leadership team data meetings. These actions, combined, helped to decrease out-of-school suspensions. Moreover, through this research project, I was able to challenge the adult mindset by providing professional development and by modeling restorative practices.

The school disciplinary policies and the school improvement plan (SIP) were foundational in addressing the exclusionary disciplinary practices at Johnson School. In fact, at the beginning of each action research cycle, I reviewed the SIP. Through an examination of the SIP, I was able to determine the intervention I would employ for each of the three research cycles. Data meetings, professional development, and peace circles were the three key interventions that were implemented during this research project.

In my final document analysis, I noted that the disciplinary policies and the SIP incorporated the following APA (2008) Zero Tolerance Task Force recommendations:

- A.1.3 Define all infractions, whether major or minor, carefully, and train all staff in appropriate means of handling each infraction.
- A. 2. 1 Reserve zero-tolerance disciplinary removals for only the most serious and severe of disruptive behaviors.
- A.2.2 Replace one-size-fits-all disciplinary strategies with graduated systems of discipline, wherein consequences are geared to the seriousness of the infraction.
- B.1.1 Implement preventive measures that can improve school climate and improve the sense of school community and belongingness.

I consider implementing the disciplinary policies and the SIP to be a success because this is the first time in five years that Johnson has directly addressed the exclusionary disciplinary practices through policy changes. As I noted in my journal entries and as documented in the leadership team meeting minutes, the revised disciplinary policies and the SIP were discussed, and the progress of the SIP action plans were monitored during our data team meetings and our local school board meetings.

Facilitating data meetings with the leadership team and discussing the school's data at the local school board meetings was another area of success. In my April 3, 2018, journal entry, I wrote:

I should continue meeting the leadership team to discuss student discipline on a weekly basis. I think this is helpful and will help us to level set the expectations of student discipline. It also gives us an opportunity to come up with interventions on a student, classroom, and school-wide level.

Through a discussion of the data, I collaborated with the school leaders. Moreover, it was a means of holding the leadership team accountable to our school-wide goals (as listed in our SIP) and the implementation of our new discipline policies.

In addition to holding the leaders accountable, during data meetings, we would discuss specific student situations and work together to determine solutions or interventions. Prior to our data meetings, I would conduct my data review by examining the number of out-of-school suspensions and by reviewing student referrals. In my critical friend interview, I noted the following:

I would look in the system and see [students] being suspended, I knew they had over ten days of suspension. I would go back and look at all their discipline referrals, count the number of days suspension, so that we could really track, and stay on top of it, and make sure that were in the specialty to do what's right and within the law, and not suspending them for over 10 days without following the process, procedure, and protocol as defined by law. So, those are definitely a success.

By examining the data prior to the meeting, I was able to create our data team agenda, discuss our current progress toward reducing suspensions, and collaborate and create solutions to some of the student behavioral incidents.

As the leadership team and I were discussing student behavioral concerns, we would reference our revised disciplinary policies to ensure that our actions were aligned with the new disciplinary protocol. Reviewing the data and discussing student and teacher concerns, despite some of the challenges, was a success. This was the first time in the past five years that the leadership team consistently met to review discipline data and establish an action plan that addressed the concerns. In my critical friend interview, I stated the following:

So, I think the success [is reviewing] the data. That was important. That was something that was created by me because the school wasn't, from what I know, going over the data with the leadership team on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. It was [a] success for me to go through those discipline referrals and suspensions on

a periodic basis [and to ensure that the SCC was being implemented]. So, if there were inconsistencies or things that needed to be addressed, I could address them. Facilitating these data meetings allowed me to collaborate, hold the leaders accountable, and monitor the progress of our action items in the SIP.

In addition to implementing the policies, SIP, and data meetings, peace circles were another successful action that addressed the exclusionary disciplinary practices. Peace circles were chosen as an intervention because the circles are explicitly listed as a restorative practice in the SCC and are an action item in the SIP. As I was coding my journals and critical friend interview, peace circles materialized as one of my most successful actions. In my April 18, 2018, journal entry, I wrote:

The exciting part was that the two staff members who showed for the circle seemed to be excited and looking forward to having the circle. We had the team member who was absent at last week's circle to participate. I didn't know what her reactions would be to the circle. However, she did participate. I enjoyed leading the circle.

I was a little nervous to introduce peace circles to the leadership team because I was not sure whether the team would recognize the benefits or feel that their time was being wasted. Being a former principal and assistant principal, I can recall how difficult it was to pull away from my regular duties and to attend meetings and professional development activities. Therefore, I stressed the benefits of circles on the school's culture and climate. After a few weeks of leading peace circles, I was able to begin incorporating professional

development topics into our circle activities. In my May 18, 2018, journal entry, I wrote the following:

This week during our leadership team's peace circle, I shared an article I found while doing research on restorative justice. This is a different approach than what I have been doing. The circles up to this point have been to build relationships and to check-in. Now I am going to use the circle format as a way to share information and educate the leadership team on the circle process and on restorative justice. So, I will begin to use articles and other readings as a means of professional development for the leadership team.

I embedded professional readings into our circle activities as a way to discuss restorative practices and develop the leadership team's capacity to implement with fidelity.

As the leadership team engaged in circle activities, I began to see shifts in our conversations. We began to examine other concerns, such as the well-being of our faculty and staff members. I noted the following in my May 31, 2018, journal entry:

Another gain was the leadership team circle. Once I again, I only had three of the five leadership team members present. But the conversation was beneficial. The one thing that stuck out was that the leadership team discussed how teachers deal with trauma and do not always know how to handle that trauma. This conversation led me to organizing an end of the year peace circle for teacher teams. I along with some of the folks that have been trained in circles will lead an end of year check-in circle. The purpose will be to introduce circles to the entire team so that we can start with circles for next year. It will also give me a pulse on

things that have worked this year, and things that we need to work on for next year. Being able to organize these circles was definitely a gain. I can't wait to write about it next week.

Not only did I feel that the conversation was beneficial to the leaders and their ability to implement restorative practices across the campus (faculty and staff included), the discussion was an eye-opener to me as I learned more about some of the personal challenges facing our teachers. The circles were so successful with the leadership team, so it encouraged me to conduct my final rounds of peace circles with the faculty and staff members.

Moreover, as I assumed the role of circle keeper, I was indeed modeling the circle process for the leadership team, faculty, and staff. Circles were a success because they helped me to build relationships, provide professional development, and model a restorative practice. The following excerpt from my critical friend review provides a summation of my reflections on the success of peace circles:

I modeled those peace circles. I co-facilitated them. I led them. Each week, I saw a difference in [the leadership team]... We would have [circles] towards the end of the day, I usually on Wednesdays, and each week I saw [a change in the leadership team members] ... It felt like the leadership team was just able to unload, ... Even though things were difficult during the day or during the week, [circles were a way to distress].

Modeling peace circles was both a beneficial experience for me as the keeper and for the participants. Keeping circles built my confidence as I challenged some of the adult

perceptions and behaviors that resulted in suspensions. The following is a reflection of one of my difficult conversations about restorative discipline with a staff member:

I had a very long and in-depth conversation with one of our security guards. She was able to give me insight on her thoughts regarding school discipline. She told me that she has had her own trauma that she dealt with as a teenager. She continues to serve as a mentor and role model for the students. However, she will not tolerate disrespect. She was candid in letting me know that it was difficult for her to accept a student's apology for the blatant disrespect. I was able to clear up some misconceptions about RJ. One of the biggest misconceptions is that students do not have consequences. In fact, students do have consequences. I was also able to explain that one of the most important concepts of RJ is repairing harm. (June 8, 2018, journal entry)

This conversation was a success because the security guard felt that the student who had harmed her did not receive a consequence for his actions. Furthermore, her perception of restorative discipline was that there were no consequences for student behavioral infractions. Through our conversation, we were able to come to some agreements about restorative discipline, and I was able to learn more about her life story and the reason she was committed to working with the students of Johnson School. Most importantly, the conversation was essential for reintegrating the student back into the school community.

I modeled and monitored the implementation of restorative practices through data meetings, peace circles, and informal staff conversations. While changing policies was essential, the data meetings supported me in monitoring and holding the leaders

accountable. Additionally, I modeled restorative practices through the circles. However, shifting the adult perceptions and mindsets was ultimately essential for changing the culture. While I do not believe that by the end of the study everyone's mindset had shifted, I was able to begin the process of changing mindsets. My reflections on shifting adult mindsets were captured in the following excerpt from my critical friend interview:

The exercises in peace circles ... help[ed] start shifting their mindsets, shift[ing] how they thought about discipline, how they thought about implementing restorative justice... I'm not going to say it fully shifted their mindset, but I definitely saw ... practices that were shifting.

In my observations, as I noted in my critical friend interview, journal entries, and in the school data, the leadership team was beginning to have restorative conversations with students. This was a success.

An analysis of the data sources (journals, documents, and critical friend interview) helped me to discover that my leadership led to positive changes in the disciplinary practices at Johnson School. The changes that were made under my direction were the inclusion of restorative practices in the disciplinary policies and procedures and in the SIP. Secondly, the leadership team data meetings and peace circles enabled me to model restorative practices, address the punitive practices, and provide professional development. Most importantly, there was a decrease in out-of-school-suspensions. I noted this decrease in the following excerpt from my February 12, 2018, journal entry: “As I review the suspension and referral data I notice that suspensions and referrals are lower than this point for the last two years.” The decrease in out-of-school suspensions,

as noted in the board meeting minutes, continued throughout the year, with the exception for the month of June 2018. Above all, the most significant success was correspondence from the state department of education stating that as of the 2017-2018 school year, the school no longer had a significant discrepancy in the rate of suspensions and expulsions for students with IEPs. Johnson School was officially in the process of transitioning to a system of restorative discipline.

Research Question Three

What were my challenges and barriers to success? While implementing a plan to shift Johnson from using punitive discipline to a more restorative approach, I encountered three challenges that were potential barriers to my success. The first challenge was my fear in responding to conflict. The second challenge I faced was the leadership team's morale. My perception was that the leadership team had low morale due to the external issues that were beyond my control. The final problem I experienced was addressing the school leaders who were disregarding the school disciplinary policies and suspending special education students over and above the daily limit.

While planning to implement restorative discipline practices, I assumed that the leadership team members, who were accustomed to using punitive disciplinary practices, would be resistant to change. Therefore, to gain the leadership team's buy-in, I was more lenient in my approach. I discussed my reasoning for reacting to conflict passively in my critical friend interview:

At times, I didn't address conflict in the more aggressive or assertive approach because I didn't want to push people away. I didn't want to create [an] atmosphere

[of distrust]... I was really just super cautious. [This] was a challenge for me....

There were still some leadership team members who were not following my directive, of using restorative approaches or following the "Don't suspend Special Ed students over to ten days without conferring with the Special Ed director."

That continued until I really had to approach that conflict.

My initial response to conflict reminds me of the following quote from President Franklin D. Roosevelt's 1933 presidential inauguration speech: "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself" (Lillian Goldman, 2008, para. 1). FDR's quote comes to mind because I was initially afraid that if I used a more aggressive approach, I would fail to make a positive impact at Johnson School.

In my experience, forcefully mandating policies and procedures could potentially lead to a lack of trust, a decrease in staff morale, and complaints to my supervisor. The following excerpt from my critical friend interview captures my thoughts as it pertains to my fear:

Responding to conflict has always been a challenge for me because I knew, especially with this particular school, that... the person who [proceeded] me really was endeared by the staff. They really loved her. They trusted her. So, I knew that if [my approach was too aggressive, I would get pushback from the faculty and staff] ... so my approach was much different. [I tried to be more understanding, more assertive, and less aggressive]. At times I think that I was maybe a little too passive, or I was maybe a little bit too fearful of conflict.

Implementing restorative discipline at Johnson School was reminiscent of a previous challenge I encountered at a different school. Similar to my previous experience, my predecessor was well respected and given credit for the academic gains and positive changes to the school's culture and climate. Just like before, I was often compared to the previous leader, and I encountered staff resistance as I used a more forceful approach to implement change. As a result, I was more mindful of my previous mistakes and vowed to become more assertive.

Through the process of journaling and reviewing data, I was able to recognize that my past leadership experiences influenced my current leadership practices. In my journal entry dated March 29, 2018, I wrote the following reflection:

I have to trust myself and trust the research that says implementing restorative justice works! I have to not worry about people being upset with me and be more concerned with making sure we support students and not send them jail. I have to not worry that the leaders will get so upset that they will go to my supervisors. I have to not worry that people will leave. I have to be more concerned with providing students with the opportunities that they deserve. I have to have a relentless drive. I can still keep my compassion, concern, and care for peoplethe adults...but it's driven in changing student outcomes. I have to face my fears.

The above journal entry illustrates the reflection that led to a change in my practice. It was at this point that I recognized my fear was becoming a barrier to my success. In addition to my past leadership experiences, another root cause of my fear stemmed from

the leadership team's disgruntled disposition. I learned of the leadership team's dissatisfaction prior to the beginning of the study. Therefore, I took a laissez-faire approach to enforcing adherence to the disciplinary policies and procedures. As I spoke with the principal on several occasions, I discovered that members of the leadership team lacked morale due to issues beyond my control that included pay raises, lack of support from Adams Corporation, and recent changes with the superintendent.

As the year progressed, the leadership team faced additional challenges that, frankly, became barriers to their performance and a successful implementation of restorative practices. I reflected on the rising issues of morale in the following excerpt from my March 16, 2018, journal entry:

The support that I need the most is for my company, my supervisors to remove the barriers that are keeping myself and the leadership team too busy that we can't focus on student learning or student discipline. The issues are growing every day, and it is causing my leadership team to lose their morale... I need the company's leadership to address these issues so that I can work to repair morale. Morale cannot be repaired unless folks have trust.

At this point during the study, the leadership team and I were devoting significant portions of the school day to addressing concerns that were ultimately the responsibility of Adams Corporation. Consequently, I found myself becoming disgruntled. In my April 26, 2018, journal entry, I wrote:

My leadership team cannot focus on restorative justice if these major issues are not addressed. The [human resource business partner of Adams Corporation]

stated [that] we need to have a meeting with teachers so that they can express their concerns. At this point, the teachers and the leaders need more than a listening ear they need action.

As the issues became unmanageable, the focus on restorative discipline decreased.

Ironically, by June, the number of out-of-school suspensions was more than double that of any other month during the school year.

Despite the declining staff morale, I continued to promote the use of restorative disciplinary practices. One day during my building rounds, a process in which I would walk through the building and observe classrooms informally, I had a conversation with students who were in the alternative education program. The alternative education program was housed inside the school building but had a different bell schedule. The school administrators placed students in the alternative education program as an alternative to expulsion. During the seven-hour day, students remained in one large classroom and completed all of their coursework online.

I captured my conversation with the alternative education students in the following excerpt from my March 9, 2018, journal entry:

Consequently today, I walked into [the alternative education program] and had a conversation with the students. [The students] told me that they felt ill-prepared for the state assessment. They told me that [their] teacher [could not] help them with math because she is not a math teacher. This is a concern because we are still responsible for ensuring the academic success of these students in alt-ed. Just putting the students on the computer is not sufficient. During my conversation

with the students, the alternative education teacher came in and stated that the students have an opportunity to go to Saturday school, but they don't. This is still unacceptable because students should get the support they need during the school day.

After having this conversation, I was appalled because we were operating an alternative education program that did not provide academic or social–emotional interventions for students. The students in our alternative education program displayed severe social–emotional issues. In fact, being in the alternative education program reminded me of a miniature prison. Students had a "sentence" given to them, and they remained in one room without any support. The students could not participate in physical education, music, art, or any extracurricular programs. When I approached the leadership team about my encounter, they gave the same excuse as the teacher; the students do not show up for Saturday school. At this point, I had to reinforce that we were not in the business of imprisoning students; we are in the business of educating students.

The response from the leadership team was an example of a significant barrier to successfully implementing restorative practices: adult mindsets. My passive approach to addressing the leadership challenges resulted in several intense encounters with a few leadership team members. Additionally, two leadership team members did not regularly attend peace circles. The following journal entry from May 31, 2018, describes my challenge with two leadership team members:

Shortly after I finished the leadership circle, I found out that [a leadership team member] was upset because he thought I undermined him by requesting that the

student apologize. In fact, the dean displayed some very inappropriate behavior.

Then, later on, I found out that [another leadership team member] suspended a SPED student, which put him at 14 days of OSS. I thought that I had made some traction with [restorative discipline], but this was frustrating. I felt like the work that has taken place over these few months was not sinking in with some members of the leadership team. These are the two leaders that have not been a part of our peace circles.

I was frustrated to learn that leadership team members continued to violate the policy by suspending special education students for more than 10 days without following our suspension and expulsion procedure for students served under Section 504. By this point, the leadership team had reviewed the data, discussed the individual needs of various students, and participated in professional development. It was disheartening for me to learn that punitive discipline was still occurring after I had place so much intentional effort into developing the capacity of the leadership team to implement restorative practices.

The encounter with the two leadership team members progressively worsened as the two leaders continued to be insubordinate. The following journal entry from June 8, 2018, describes my encounter with one of the contumacious leaders:

This week was a challenging week. One of our key leadership team members received corrective action for displaying inappropriate behavior. What I thought would be a restorative conversation ended up being a very intense and hostile conversation. This team member blamed his inappropriate behavior on my

communication and leadership. I went into the conversation thinking that this would have been the perfect opportunity for me to model restorative justice. However, this key staff member has not [bought] into the whole idea of restorative justice. How do we move forward as a school with [restorative discipline] if this team member does not buy- into the big picture? There needs to be some additional open and honest conversations regarding restorative justice and our current discipline system.

At the time of this incident, I had already given verbal directives, provided professional development, reviewed data, and modeled restorative practices. Now, I had issued corrective action. I personally feel that corrective action for school leaders is unnecessary because the leadership should be the examples for the entire faculty and staff. In this case, I had a leader who was not willing to receive feedback or discuss the situation in a non-hostile manner. A restorative approach has to begin with the school leadership, and a key member of the leadership team is not on-board.

In summary, implementing restorative disciplinary practices as an alternative to suspensions presented several challenges for Johnson School. After discovering that my passive approach to confronting challenges was becoming a barrier to success, I began to shift the way in which I responded to conflict. Despite shifting gears and changing my approach, the external issues remained at the forefront of the leadership team's concerns, and morale remained an ongoing issue. To fully implement restorative practices, I needed the entire leadership team's support. Without their support, implementation of restorative practices for the next year would be a daunting task.

Research Question Four

In what ways were my mindset and leadership practices impacted as I led change? Through the data analysis process, I identified one significant leadership practice that changed during this self-study. However, there was no indication that my mindset changed. Throughout this study, I remained positive, despite the various challenges and barriers to success. I describe my mindset in the following excerpt from my critical friend interview:

[I have a growth mindset] I don't see the glass as being half empty, but I always see [it] as being half full. I'm always looking ... at challenges from a perspective of how do we meet or conquer this challenge. At times, we've had challenges where my leadership team [felt] defeated. But, I always [attempted to refocus our attention on the positive aspects].

Remaining positive and focusing on the overarching goal of addressing the STPP was my way of thinking.

My positive intentions and laser-like focus were evident in the leadership team agendas and the school board meeting documents. For example, during each leadership team meeting, we shared the positive things that were happening at Johnson and in each of the leader's personal lives. I intentionally focused on affirming the great things that were happening both professionally and personally as a way to motivate and encourage the leadership team. Additionally, during our leadership team meetings, we created action plans to address our concerns. Creating action plans shifted the focus from discussing problems to creating solutions. I used the same approach when creating the leadership

team's school board report. The prior year's board reports only included concerns, so I required the leaders to create action items to target concerns and areas of improvement.

Furthermore, my aim has always been to use a restorative approach to school discipline. In my May 2, 2018, journal entry, I wrote: "My overall intent was to get the leadership team to understand that restorative justice/peace circles can work in our school." I trusted the research on restorative practices, so the SIP included professional development, leadership circles, and data meetings as interventions to address the overuse of suspensions. My drive and commitment to restorative justice are rooted in my passion for transforming educational outcomes for black and brown students. I share my motivation for this work in the following excerpt from my critical friend interview:

I want to make sure that our students are receiving an equitable and just education. I want our students to be treated fairly... [and given] opportunities to learn from their mistakes.... Just like we teach them how to read, write, [and compute], we need to teach them how to behave. We need to teach them how to handle their anger, how to handle their trauma.

I wholeheartedly believe that school is a place where students learn, despite being faced with external factors (i.e., trauma and poverty). Our charge as educators is to provide all students with the necessary support needed to ensure their success. This has been my ideology throughout this study.

Although my mindset has not changed, I had to alter my leadership approach and practices in response to my fear and the insubordination of the two leadership team

members. The following is a reflection on facing my fears taken from my March 29, 2018, journal entry:

I move slowly because of fear. I fear that I may not be successful, I fear that my administrators won't support the efforts I am trying to do. I fear that my leaders won't support me. I fear that I have the potential to ruin the entire school culture and climate. I really need to work on facing my fears.

Facing my fears required me to be more direct in my approach with the leadership team members. As I discussed in the previous question, my fear of losing trust and being viewed as an incompetent leader were barriers to my success. In the above journal entry, I was beginning to realize that my fear of failure was not helping me to reach my goal of transforming Johnson into a restorative community.

As a result, my leadership practices began to change, and I became more assertive with the leadership team. I discuss my revised approach in the following excerpt of my critical friend interview:

By the time I approached [my fear], [the problems with the leadership team] was sort of bubbling over to a point where there were some HR reprimands... that had to take place... [I had come to the point where] ... I was able just to face [my fears] and be very clear. There were times I was able to be very clear and say, "We cannot do this practice," or, "We cannot continue to treat students this way." At times, I was very, very upfront and very directive to the point in saying, "This cannot happen anymore."

At the beginning of the last cycle of this study, I changed my approach by providing clear expectations around issuing suspensions. When the leadership team did not meet the expectations, I followed up with an official reprimand.

In addition to being more assertive and providing clear expectations with the leadership team, I had to change my approach with my colleagues from Adams Corporation. During this study, several significant incidents were escalated to the Adams Corporation leadership team. For example, a student was accused of threatening the safety of the school. On several occasions, my Adams Corporation colleagues made reference to enforcing zero-tolerance practices. At first, I was nervous, and I did not speak up on behalf of the students. Eventually, as noted in my March 10, 2018, journal entry, I told members from the Adams Corporation team the reason we should never apply zero-tolerance practices when dealing with student discipline. As a result, we followed our SCC, and, in some cases, we used alternatives to expulsion.

Restorative disciplinary practices and social–emotional interventions are my approaches to student discipline. While my mindset was centered on educating and supporting students, I learned that fear was holding me back from implementing restorative practices at Johnson. Therefore, I not only had to be more assertive with my leadership team but also with my colleagues at Adams Corporation. I could no longer allow my fears to get in the way of changing the policies and practices that are inequitable for black and brown students. As I discussed in my critical friend interview, my mantra became "We are not in the business of running a prison, we are here to educate students!"

Summary

Exclusionary discipline is an issue of social justice and inequality for African American students (CCRR, 2015). At Johnson School, despite all of the efforts to improve the school's culture and climate, the school leaders struggled to provide alternatives to suspension that resulted in a suspension rate that is 5 times greater than the state's. In addition to the abnormal suspension rate, special education students were suspended over and above 10 days without having a manifestation of determination meeting as required by state and federal mandates. Once I became aware of the issues of exclusionary discipline that preceded my appointment as superintendent, I immediately began to investigate the practices and policies that promoted the overuse of suspensions. I learned that out-of-school suspension was the "status-quo" for handling student disciplinary issues. I further discovered that the leadership team and staff members who were responsible for student discipline had not received training in restorative approaches to discipline.

The findings of this research study were a means for me to discover my role, successes, challenges, and changes to my leadership practices as I addressed the issues of exclusionary discipline at Johnson School. As I analyzed my journal entries, critical friend interview, and school documents, the theme of leadership consistently emerged. According to Kersten (2012), superintendents "must have the knowledge and skills necessary to ... lead district improvement efforts" (p. 27). More specifically, my data analysis unveiled that I provided leadership to the Johnson School leadership team by setting expectations, monitoring, supporting, and modeling. Given the nature of my role,

I was not surprised to discover that leadership surfaced as a theme. However, I was astonished to learn that the CRSL's leading with courage and transformative leadership emerged as themes from the data analysis (Khalifa et al., 2016).

As the superintendent, I addressed Johnson's over usage of exclusionary discipline by first orchestrating changes to the disciplinary policies and procedures. Then, I implemented interventions that provided the school-based leadership team with a structured way to review school discipline data and strategize on our approach to discipline. Next, I determined that professional development was essential to the successful implementation of restorative approaches. After learning about the positive effects of peace circles on the school culture and climate, I instituted peace circles for the leadership team and eventually integrated peace circles for the instructional team at Johnson School. Each approach was a courageous step in challenging the systemic policies and practices that resulted in inequitable numbers of students excluded from school (Khalifa, 2011; Maenette et al., 1998).

I further demonstrated courage as I critically reflected on my leadership practices and faced my fear of failure. This self-epiphany helped me to revise my approach and become more assertive as I integrated theory into practice (Gooden & Dantley, 2012). Despite the challenges that were beyond my control, I continued being a champion for restorative justice by setting the expectation that Johnson School is an institution of learning, and administrators will be held accountable for implementing our new disciplinary practices and policies with fidelity. Ultimately, I was creating a supportive school environment in which all students could be successful and receive an equitable

education (Shields, 2010). By focusing on data, building relationships through peace circles, modeling restorative practices, and embedding professional learning, Johnson School was able to decrease the number of out-of-school suspensions for all students during the 2017-2018 school year. In summary, transforming Johnson School to a restorative campus required me to be a courageous, reflective, and transformative leader.

CHAPTER V

INTERPRETATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In Chapter I, I addressed an overview of the study, including the context, setting, problem, and purpose. The contextual background of this study is based on the research of our country's zero-tolerance policies that have resulted in an inequitable number of African American students being suspended and expelled from school. These exclusionary disciplinary practices have a direct link to high school graduation rates. Given the relationship between exclusionary discipline and high school graduation rates, school districts across the country are revising student disciplinary policies and practices to incorporate interventions and alternatives to suspensions (CCRR, 2015; Dancy, 2014; Skiba et al., 2014; Wilson, 2013). Similar to other schools across the country, Johnson School has struggled with implementing alternative school discipline practices. For instance, during the 2015-2016 school year, Johnson School had a suspension rate that was significantly greater than that of the state and was cited for non-compliance with special education laws as they pertain to out-of-school suspensions. In response to Johnson's overuse of exclusionary disciplinary practices, the purpose of this study was to determine my impact, as superintendent of Johnson school, on addressing the STPP by implementing a plan to reduce out-of-school suspensions.

Chapter II begins with an analysis and history of public schooling and how the federal government has increased its role in public education in response to the public's outcry for educational reformation (Chopin, 2012; Kyle & Jenks, 2002). More specifically, it was the 1994 Gun-Free School Act that introduced the concept of zero-tolerance policies as a means of keeping schools safe. Contrarily, the federal mandate did not increase school safety but resulted in policies and practices that directly link student outcomes to the justice system, deemed the school-to-prison-pipeline (STPP; Skiba et al., 2014). The APA's Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) recommends a list of actions that schools and districts should implement to address the STPP. These actions include changing disciplinary policies and procedures, implementing restorative disciplinary practices, and providing training and professional development on culturally relevant teaching. Given the APA's Zero Tolerance Task Force recommendations, Chapter II reviews the literature tied to the theoretical framework used in this study, Culturally Relevant School Leadership (CRSL), and the primary intervention used in this study, restorative disciplinary practices (peace circles).

Chapter III presents the self-study and action research methodologies that were selected as a way for me, as a research practitioner, to improve my craft through critical self-reflection (Hamilton, Smith, & Worthington, 2008; Herr & Anderson, 2005). Through the cyclical action research approach, I was able to collect and triangulate my data sources to examine the following research questions:

Primary question:

- What is my role in shifting a school culture from a punitive based discipline structure to using researched based-interventions and restorative approaches to school discipline?

Secondary questions:

- What were my successes?
- What were my challenges and barriers to success?
- In what ways are my mindset and leadership practices impacted as I led change?

In Chapter IV, I unveil my findings that suggest that the role of the superintendent or school leader in addressing exclusionary disciplinary policies and practices is to provide leadership that will courageously confront practices and mindsets that result in the marginalization of students (Khalifa, 2011; Maenette et al., 1998). Furthermore, confronting the STPP calls for a leader who is transformative. Transformative leadership uses critical reflection and analysis to address the power and privilege of the dominant culture and create learning environments that are inclusive for all students (Shields, 2010). Additionally, in Chapter IV, I discuss my encounter with fear. My fear resulted in a leadership style that was passive and lenient. Through critical reflection, I acknowledged my fears and changed my leadership practices

In Chapter V, I will discuss the findings of this research study and explain their relationship to the CRSL theoretical framework. I will further consider the implications

for further research, practice, and recommendations. I will then discuss the limitations of the study and conclude by summarizing the focal points of the study.

Summary of Findings

This research study assisted me in discovering my role, as the superintendent of Johnson School, in addressing the exclusionary disciplinary practices that resulted in a significant number of general education and special education students being suspended and expelled from Johnson School. An analysis of reflective journal entries, school documents, and a critical friend interview yielded the theme of leadership. I demonstrated leadership, as the district-level (onsite) administrator for Johnson School, by implementing a multi-cycle strategy to reduce suspensions. Prior to the first cycle, I collaborated with the leadership team and the school board to adopt and revise the school's disciplinary policies and procedures. During the first cycle, I coordinated regular meetings to review discipline data with the leadership team and the school board.

While reflecting on the data, I identified that professional development for the leadership team was essential to Johnson School becoming a restorative campus. Instituting peace circles for the leadership team and eventually the teaching staff was my final strategy. By introducing circles to the leadership team, I was modeling a restorative practice, building relationships, and developing the capacity of the leadership team. The following is a reflection on the impact of circles on the leadership team as documented in my critical friend interview:

I modeled those peace circles. I co-facilitated them. I led them. Each week, I saw a difference in [the leadership team]... We would have [circles] towards the end of

the day, I usually on Wednesdays, and each week I saw [a change in the leadership team members] ... It felt like the leadership team was just able to unload, ... Even though things were difficult during the day or during the week, [circles were a way to destress].

Additionally, the circles gave teachers an avenue to express their concerns and provide suggestions for the upcoming school year. Finally, the circles were a pathway for me to introduce restorative practices to the entire faculty.

While executing a plan to address exclusionary discipline, I was able to examine my successes and challenges. The elements of my plan that were the most successful in helping me to achieve my goals were the implementation of new disciplinary policies, peace circles, and data meetings. Additional successes were leadership accountability, professional development, and modeling restorative practices. While the findings indicate the celebrations and successes, the leadership team's low morale, external issues that were beyond my control, and my fears were potential barriers to my success. The low morale and insubordination of two leadership team members continued to worsen for the majority of the study. While some of the challenges were outside my control, I was able to persevere and work to minimize the negative impact of morale and other external issues on my plan to implement restorative practices.

My determination to transform Johnson School into a restorative campus led me to reflect on my past and present leadership experiences. In response to my reflections, I remained positive and continued with my plan to implement restorative practices. Next, I faced my fears of losing the trust of the leadership team, failing to reduce the suspension

rate, or failing to positively impact the students by altering my approach with the leadership team. My revised method was to be more assertive in my interactions with both the Johnson School leadership team and my colleagues at Adams Corporation. By challenging the exclusionary disciplinary practices, I was addressing systemic issues of social justice and equity, which are the characteristics of a courageous and transformative leader (Khalifa et al., 2016)

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this research imply that addressing the STPP requires a leader to be culturally relevant. More specifically, a culturally relevant leader must be both courageous and transformative. A leader who is both courageous and transformative uses critical self-reflection as a catalyst to address issues of equity and justice at the school, district, and community levels (Alston, 2005; Gooden, 2005; Khalifa, 2011; Maenette et al., 1998; Shields, 2010). Furthermore, the findings of this research indicate that the attributes of the critical self-reflection strand of Khalifa et al.'s (2016) CRSL framework are all intertwined.

Courageous leaders challenge policies and practices that result in the marginalization of students (Khalifa, 2011). Most importantly, courageous leaders reflect on their own beliefs, experiences, and methods to strengthen their impact on the schools and communities in which they serve (Maenette et al., 1998). Courageous leaders fundamentally believe that schools must meet the cultural needs of students, which may require challenging the traditional mindsets and practices of the adult stakeholders (Khalifa, 2011; Maenette et al., 1998).

Very similar to courageous leadership, transformative leaders address the power and privilege of the dominant culture to create equitable and inclusive school environments (Shields, 2010). Moreover, transformative leaders must critique their practices and then take action against inequity through activism and community organizing to promote educational reformation (Alston, 2005; Gooden, 2005; Shields, 2010). The essential difference between transformational leadership and transformative leadership is that transformational leadership focuses on organizational change, whereas transformative leadership targets both organizational and societal change (Shields, 2010).

Courageous and transformative leaders are dedicated to changing both the school and the community at large (Alston, 2005; Gooden, 2005; Khalifa, 2011; Maenette et al., 1998; Shields, 2010). When merged with the other critical self-awareness behaviors of Khalifa et al.'s (2016) CRSL framework, the description of a courageous and transformative leader is adapted and includes the following attributes of a leader devoted to addressing issues of equity and justice: continually developing as a multicultural leader (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006); critically reflecting on his or her ideologies and practices, both in and out of school (Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Johnson, 2006); disaggregating the data and seeking to understand the inequities and their implications (Skrla et al., 2004); incorporating the voices of all stakeholders, with particular emphasis on students, parents, and the community (Ishimaru, 2014; Smyth, 2006); and challenging and changing inequitable school policies, practices, and ideologies (Theoharis & Haddiux, 2011). In summary, courageous school leadership practices (i.e., challenging punitive disciplinary policies, practices, and ideologies) leads to transformative outcomes.

Courageous Leadership

During this study, I took several courageous steps to address the punitive disciplinary issues at Johnson School. While the suspension data from the 2016-2017 school year showed a significant reduction in out-of-school suspensions compared to the 2015-2016 school year, I was not content because punitive discipline continued. Furthermore, Johnson's 2016-2017 school year suspension rate was five times greater than the state's, and special education students were being suspended above and beyond the 10-day threshold without a manifestation of determination meeting. My observations were that current best practices for school discipline were not being implemented. Thus, suspensions were down, but the discipline policies did not include interventions or restorative practices. As a result, my first courageous act was changing the disciplinary policies and incorporating restorative practices into the school's SIP. While the policy changes occurred a few months prior to the start of the study, the SCC and the SIP were instrumental in choosing the interventions for this study.

While planning to implement my first intervention, a review of suspension data, coupled with my observations, unveiled that the policies may have changed, but the disciplinary practices remained the same. As I kept a close eye on the data and began to have conversations with several leadership team members, students, parents, alumni, and other faculty and staff, it became clear that addressing the punitive disciplinary practices required a shift in school culture. Changing from punitive discipline to restorative practices required challenging mindsets. Before challenging mindsets, I had to recognize that the entire leadership team had very little exposure or training on restorative

disciplinary practices. For Johnson School, zero tolerance and punitive discipline had been effective strategies used to achieve an orderly environment. Despite the seemingly controlled school culture, Johnson School still struggled with student achievement, graduation rates, and, most importantly, compliance with special education laws and mandates. Given Johnson's struggle with academics and compliance, I questioned the effectiveness of the traditional punitive disciplinary practices.

While I am an advocate for restorative practices, I empathized with the school leaders due to their lack of exposure to alternatives to suspension. If the leaders had only been exposed to punitive discipline, then how could they implement restorative practices with fidelity? My job, as superintendent, was to coach and support the leaders through this transition. Relying solely on policy adoptions would not lead to the sustainability of implementing restorative practices. Therefore, my next intervention was to begin reviewing discipline data and behavior referrals as a way to collaborate and calibrate with the leadership team.

After a couple of months of reviewing suspension data with the leadership team and the school board, I devised a plan to integrate professional development into the leadership team's schedule. The training consisted of a four-day peace circle workshop and two one-day restorative practices workshops. Both sets of workshops were facilitated by community organizations that have partnered with schools and districts across the country to implement restorative disciplinary practices. After attending the professional development on peace circles with school-based team members, I determined that my final intervention was modeling restorative practices, primarily through peace circles. In

addition to modeling restorative practices for the leadership team, I used peace circles as an opportunity to provide additional professional development on restorative practices.

Peace circles provided an opportunity for me to build relationships and strengthen communication with the leadership team and eventually the teaching faculty (Pranis, 2005). Implementing weekly circles with the leadership team was a shift in practice. We were shifting from the traditional style of administrative meetings that included power structures, agendas, and action items to a process that required shared leadership, equity of voice, respect, and self-awareness (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015). Weekly circles were a way to shift the practices and ideologies of the leadership team courageously. Furthermore, circles created a space for me to reflect further and approach the resistance I experienced both inwardly and from the leadership team.

Before implementing peace circles, I noticed that there was resistance from two leadership team members. Despite receiving professional development and discussing the data, the two school leaders were not following the new disciplinary policies. While critically reflecting on my progress and strategy, I determined that I could not address the resistance from the leadership team members until I came to grips with my struggle with fear. Reflective journaling helped me to recognize that I was operating out of the fear of failure. I was afraid that implementing restorative practices against the will of the leadership team would result in me losing their trust. I was further afraid that implementing restorative practices could potentially disrupt the orderly school environment. Then, I would be viewed as incompetent. Most importantly, I was fearful of the potential negative impacts on my employment.

I, however, courageously dealt with my fear by first recognizing that my anxiety was contributing to the STPP at Johnson. My silence and slow response to the leaders who were continuing with punitive discipline were encouraging their practice. After my epiphany, I then focused on the best interest of the students and changed my approach to become more assertive. I knew that shifting to restorative practices would drive an increase in student outcomes (graduation rates and achievement). Most importantly, my concern was that the unfair practices would continue to exclude our students from the school.

My stance became very similar to Chief Executive Officer of Chicago Public Schools Janice Jackson, who said: “I don’t make decisions based on fear” (Emmanuel, 2018, para. 5). Jackson, the newly appointed CEO of the third largest school district in the United States, faced public criticism, a student sexual abuse district-wide crisis, declining enrollment, and a special education program that was out of compliance. However, her focus remained on servicing students by ensuring a safe, equitable, and academically rigorous environment for all students (Emmanuel, 2018). I wholeheartedly relate to Dr. Jackson. Here I was in my first year as superintendent and facing compliance issues with the state, witnessing students unjustly excluded from the school, facing the decline of resources, and managing external problems that were the responsibility of Adams Corporation. After confronting my fears, my approach was similar to Dr. Jackson’s. I focused on challenging discontent and the status quo while keeping a keen focus on the needs of the students I served; that is courageous leadership!

Transformative Leadership

Courageously facing my fears and concentrating my efforts on achieving positive student outcomes were the catalyst for genuinely addressing Johnson School's issues of equity. According to the United States Census Bureau (2016), Rogers City had a median income of \$28,020, which is just below the federal poverty level for a family of five (U.S. Centers, 2019). Additionally, Johnson School is a predominately African American school with a 2016-2017 graduation rate of 45.5% and a suspension rate that is five times greater than the state's. Johnson School's graduation rate is 46% below the state's graduation rate (Indiana Department, 2017a). These numbers alone signify issues of equity.

Addressing punitive discipline and out-of-school suspension was indeed tackling issues of social justice and equity. Johnson School's problems with exclusionary discipline are more than a temporary solution for a safe and orderly environment; they are about the future success of the students. How could Johnson have a safe and orderly environment with 55% of students not graduating, 77% not passing the Algebra exam, and 59% not passing the English exam? According to research, moving away from exclusionary disciplinary practices would have a positive impact on graduation rates because suspension increases a student's likelihood of dropping out (Skiba et al., 2014). Thus, my real focus was changing the trajectory of student outcomes by focusing on exclusionary discipline, which has a direct impact on high school graduation rates. According to the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (ODPHP; 2017), "high school graduates have less chance of being in prison, greater financial stability as

adults, and fewer health problems” (para. 1). Therefore, high school graduation is an important predictor of the future success of our students.

Ensuring that students are successful upon graduation has always been my focus in my role as superintendent of Johnson. When fear began to disrupt my mission, I had to realign my efforts and continue fighting for social justice and equity for students. An example of my focus on social justice was speaking out against zero-tolerance policies to my Adams Corporation colleagues. Another example was consistently sending the message to the school leadership team that: “we are in the business of educating and not imprisoning students.” I even furthered my efforts to increase student graduation rates by implementing several interventions, which included revising the summer school credit recovery program and reviewing the credit recovery data. As my involvement increased with changing student outcomes, my level of social justice and equity activism increased.

Activism led me to organize community meetings to garner support when the Rogers' City emergency manager threatened to close Johnson School. Additionally, I worked with the Johnson School Alumni Association to expand their support, influence, and impact on our students. I also attended a state board of education meeting and publicly spoke out against the proposed budget cuts, which would have impacted our ability to provide various academic and social-emotional interventions. Most importantly, when leading professional development with the faculty and staff or when formally addressing students at school events, my objective was to empower students and staff to become actively involved in the fight for social justice and equity.

My activism work with Johnson School mirrors my commitment to community and social service in my personal time. For over a decade, I have volunteered with various community-based non-profit organizations, whose mission is to serve students in underprivileged communities. Examples of my community and social service work include raising money for scholarships, developing community-based mentoring programs for youth, and mentoring new teachers and rising school leaders. My volunteer work is directly tied with my passion for providing access and opportunity for black and brown students who have a low socioeconomic status.

Summary

The primary purpose of this study was to reflect on my impact as the superintendent in addressing the policies and practices of Johnson School that contributed to the high number of students being excluded from the school and the failure to follow special education compliance. Through critical self-reflection, I was able to confront my fears and courageously confront and challenge the practices, policies, and ideologies of Johnson School that were resulting in massive numbers of students being excluded from the school. As I courageously directed my attention to positively changing student outcomes by analyzing school data, participating in and providing professional learning to the leadership team, using critical reflection as a form of self-awareness, improving policy, modeling and leading restorative practices, and providing space to listen to multiple stakeholder groups, I became transformative. My goal was not just to transform Johnson but also to ensure equity and justice for the students we served. While there is

still much work left to be done, I am confident that I was able to make an impact on the STPP at Johnson School.

Implications for District and School Leaders

Why is courageous and transformative leadership important in addressing the STPP and other issues of equity and justice? The simple response is that the conversation in our educational landscape has shifted from equality to equity. A brief historical review of education and the Civil Rights Movement reveals the shift of focus to equity. The Civil Rights Movement and the historic *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* case overturned the separate but equal Supreme Court ruling (Chopin, 2012; Hilbert, 2017). The ruling made segregated schools illegal. To ensure that schools were desegregating and school districts were promoting equality, the original Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 (ESEA) was signed into law (U.S. Department, 2017f). After three decades of focusing on equality through provisions of the ESEA, No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) ushered in a new era of accountability. NCLB exposed the achievement gaps and concerns with equity for black and brown students. Nearly 50 years after the original ESEA, the 2015 revised federal policy, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) placed a focus on providing equitable resources for disadvantaged and high-needs students (U.S. Department, 2017f).

Given that our country's educational focus is now equity, a close examination of the suspension and expulsion data has revealed that African-American students are disproportionately suspended and expelled from schools. Suspension and expulsion have been traditionally used to keep schools safe and create cultures that are conducive to

learning. However, exclusionary discipline does not positively change the school culture or create safer school environments (APA, 2008). Suspension and expulsion have an impact on the rates of high school dropout and incarceration (Cramer et al., 2014).

The exclusionary zero-tolerance disciplinary practices, sparked by the federal government's 1994 Gun-Free School Act, raised concerns about civil rights violations for black and brown students (CCRR, 2015). While focusing on equity, the Obama Administration issued guidance requiring that schools limit the usage of exclusionary discipline and focus on school environments that are safe and supportive (CCRR, 2015). However, on December 18, 2018, the Federal Commission on School Safety presented a plan that rescinds the Obama era guidance on school discipline. The new direction focuses on preventing school violence; protecting students and teachers; mitigating the effects of violence; and responding to and recovering from violent attacks. However, this new guidance removes the references to the disparate impact of legal theory, which calls into account that discriminatory school policies and practices (i.e., suspension and expulsion) are potential violations of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (U.S. Department, 2018).

The Federal Department of Education is now asking schools to "Rethink School Discipline" (U.S. Department, 2018). The focus now moves from tracking suspension and expulsion by race to ensuring that classrooms and schools are safe and orderly. Therefore, the federal government is not intervening on the issues of equity and justice as it relates to the suspension and expulsion of black and brown students. The change from addressing the STPP was a result of school leaders and educators complaining that

limiting suspension and expulsion does not keep schools safe (U.S. Department, 2018).

The U.S. Department of Education's new guidance contradicts recent research on the impact of zero-tolerance policies, the STPP, and the effects of suspensions and expulsion.

Therefore, we now more than ever before need district and school leaders to implement strategies that will address the issues of equity and justice, including but not limited to exclusionary school discipline. Courageous and transformative leadership is necessary to continue challenging policies and practices that lead to a disproportionate number of black and brown students being suspended and expelled. We need leaders committed to being critically consciousness of their practices and beliefs. Practicing critical consciousness will lead to activism at the local, state, and federal levels. Most importantly, we need leaders who will engage all stakeholders throughout the process.

To assist district and school leaders in becoming reflective practitioners who are courageous and transformative, I have constructed a practical framework that is based on the tenets of LaBoskey's (2004) five elements of self-study, Stringer's (2014) Look, Think, and Act framework, and Khalifa et al.'s (2016) critical self-awareness behaviors of the CRSL. The Framework for Courageous and Transformative Educational Leaders (CTEL), shown in Figure 3, is intended to be feasible and easy to implement and follow. The circular representation of the framework signifies the cyclical process of addressing issues of equity and justice (i.e., punitive discipline) by planning, developing, acting, and reflecting. As school leaders cycle through the framework and develop as courageous and transformative leaders, they will adapt and create their own strategies in addition to those listed in the CTEL.

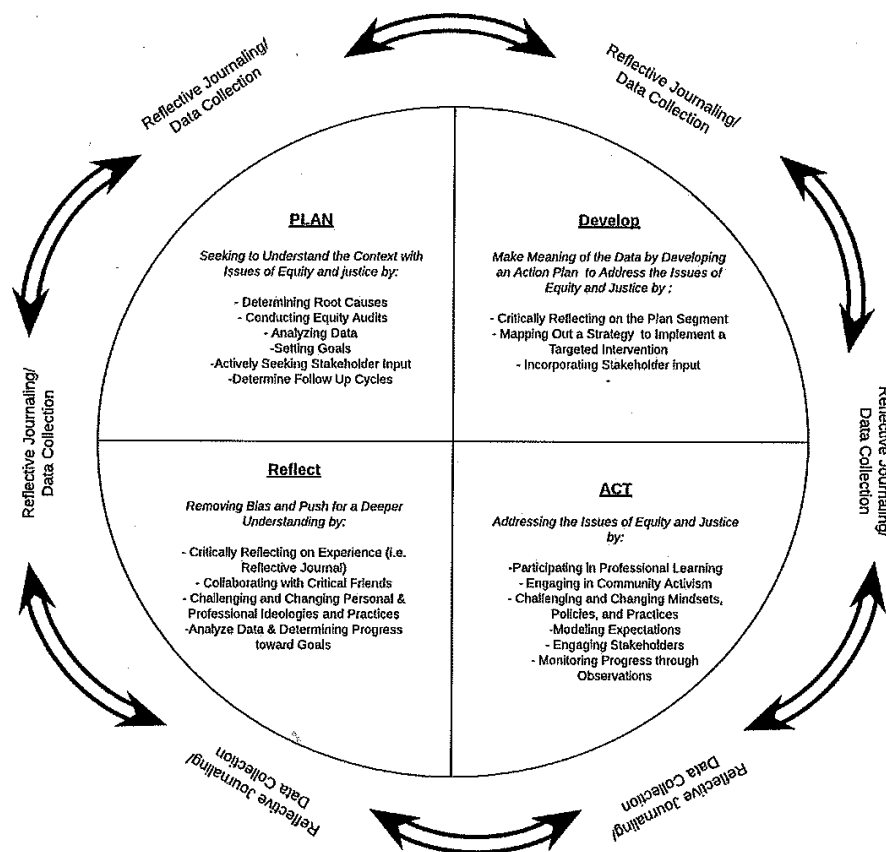


Figure 3. The Framework for Courageous and Transformative Educational Leaders (CTEL)

The primary objective of the PLAN segment of the CTCL is for educational leaders to become learners and gather information to determine the context and the root causes surrounding the issues of equity (Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Kersten, 2012; Stringer, 2014). The recommended actions a leader should take during the PLAN segment are: conducting equity audits to reflect on the ideologies, practices, and policies that result in issues of equity (Skrla et al., 2004); disaggregating, analyzing, and

transparently making the data and its findings public (Skrla et. al., 2004); creating goals to determine progress (Skrla et al., 2004); and actively seeking stakeholder input and perspectives while engaging them to become agents of change (Ishimaru, 2014; Kersten, 2012; Smyth, 2006). For follow-up cycles, leaders should use the PLAN segment to determine the necessary additions or modifications. The objective of the DEVELOP segment of the CTCL is to make meaning of the data and develop an action plan to address the equity issue(s) (Stringer, 2014). The recommended actions an educational leader should take during the DEVELOP segment are: critically reflecting on the data gathered during the planning segment and then devising a strategy to implement a targeted intervention (Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Johnson, 2006; Stringer, 2014) and incorporating stakeholder input into the action plan (Ishimaru, 2014; Kersten, 2012; Smyth, 2006).

In the ACT segment of the CTCL, leaders should address issues of equity and justice by implementing an action plan (Stringer, 2014). Suggestions of strategies to be included in the action plan are: participating in professional learning to continue development as a multicultural leader (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006); engaging in community activism (Alston, 2005; Gooden, 2005; Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015; Shields, 2010); challenging and changing contrary mindsets, policies, and practices (Khalifa, 2011; Maenette et al., 1998; Tehoaris & Haddix, 2011); modeling expectations by “walking the talk” (LaBoskey, 2014); engaging stakeholders during implementation (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Ishimaru, 2014; Kersten, 2012; Smyth, 2006); and observing and monitoring the process (Samaras & Freese, 2009). Finally, in the

REFLECT segment of the CTET, the school leader should remove bias and push for a deeper understanding by: critically reflecting on his or her experience (Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015; Khalifa, 2011; Maenette et al., 1998; Shields, 2010); collaborating with a critical friend (Herr & Anderson, 2005; LaBoskey, 2014); challenging and changing his or her personal and professional ideologies and practices (Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Johnson, 2006); and analyzing the data to determine progress toward goals (Skrila et al., 2004).

The outer layer of double-directional arrows indicates that an educational leader can begin, continue, or revisit any of the segments at any given time. The double-directional concept was chosen to accommodate leaders who may be at various stages of addressing issues of equity and justice. My recommendation is that leaders begin with the PLAN segment. Nevertheless, there may be a leader who has already planned and is in the middle of developing an implementation plan. Then, the recommendation would be that the leader should begin with the DEVELOP segment. Additionally, there may be a leader who has done everything except taken the time to reflect, and then that leader should begin with the REFLECT segment. After reflecting, the leader may want to go back to the ACT phase and begin modeling practices. The stage at which the leader will begin will depend on their current level of involvement with the issues of equity and justice.

In addition to finding the appropriate starting point, an essential component of the framework is that the leader must be committed to some reflective journaling and data collection. In this study, I chose to reflect on all stages of the process using my reflective

journaling prompts (listed in Appendix A). Other examples of data collection through reflective journaling may be creative writing, drawing, or voice recording. The CTET framework engages school leaders (practitioners) in a reflective process that helps leaders to better understand and develop their leadership capacity while intersecting theory and research to address issues of equity and justice (Dinkelman, 2003; Herr & Anderson, 2005; LaBoseky, 2004). The design of the CTET framework is less sequential and more cyclical to meet the individual needs of the educational leader and the setting of the district or school in which he or she serves. Moreover, the framework expands the educational leaders' impact by engaging the leader in strategic actions that embody courageous and transformational leadership.

Recommendations for Future Research

The methodologies of self-study and action research were chosen to help me develop as an educational leader while addressing the issues of equity and justice as they relate to punitive disciplinary practices at Johnson School (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Using Khalifa et al.'s (2016) CRSL framework, I critically reflected on my journal entries, discipline data, school policies, and critical friend interview to determine my role, successes, challenges, and changes to both my thinking and practice. The findings and implications of this research add to the growing body of self-study and action research conducted by district and school leaders who seek to infuse theory and practice into the context of their leadership roles. Furthermore, using the critical self-reflective leadership behaviors of the CRSL, this research provides strategies for addressing issues of equity and justice at the district or school level.

As our country is shifting its educational focus from equality and compliance to equity, there is an emerging need for additional research on equity, justice, punitive discipline, and school culture and climate. Further studies should be conducted using the CTCL framework. Some potential research topics include using other restorative practices as interventions to address the STPP; the effects of restorative practices on school culture and climate; increasing graduation rates through cultural consciousness; and the impact of district- and school-level leadership on the culture and climate. Finally, as we transition from the Obama era guidance on school discipline, which directed attention to decreasing punitive disciplinary measures, additional research will be needed to advocate and drive the federal, state, and local school disciplinary policies that contribute to the marginalization of black and brown students.

Limitations

While conducting the action research and self-study, the researcher becomes both a practitioner and a researcher, who uses a reflective process to promote self-development. The researcher essentially controls the study from start to finish (Feldman, 2009; Hamilton et al., 2008; Herr & Anderson, 2005; LaBoskey, 2004). However, as I conducted my research, several unforeseen obstacles limited the findings of the study. These obstacles, which were discussed in the Findings section of Chapter IV, were beyond the scope of my role as superintendent. Traditionally, superintendents act as the CEO and have the power to make decisions while answering to a school board. In this case, my authority to address obstacles, such as staff morale and operational deficiencies, was limited. Johnson's management company, Adams Corporation, had the sole power to

address the interferences and disruptions. While the study continued and I was able to do some maneuvering around the restrictions placed on the study, some of the findings and implications may have been impacted.

Departing Thoughts

As our country has shifted its focus to equity, the Trump Administration's guidance on school discipline has seemingly given schools the green light to continue with punitive disciplinary practices that target students of color. The new guidance contradicts the essential goal of K-12 education, which is to prepare youth to become college and career ready. Furthermore, the new guidance contradicts research that shows a correlation between zero-tolerance policies and high school dropout and incarceration rates (APA, 2008). Moreover, these exclusionary disciplinary practices and policies do not address the root cause of student behaviors and hinder students from receiving an academically rigorous education (Benner et al., 2013). Ironically, suspensions and expulsions have a negative impact on a school's culture and climate (Skiba et al., 2014).

For such a time as this, our country is in need of educational leaders who will courageously challenge and change the policies and practices that result in the marginalization of black and brown students (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006). By critically reflecting and developing as a culturally responsive leaders, superintendents and principals will become transformative activists who advocate for equity in education. As leaders in school districts and communities, superintendents and principals must engage all stakeholders in the fight for social justice and equity (Alston, 2005; Gooden, 2005; Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015; Shields, 2010). Educational leaders cannot let the absence

or change of policy violate our students' civil rights. In the words of Mohandas Gandhi, we must "be the change that we want to see in the world." While it may be difficult to change federal guidance and policies, we have the power to lead the change of ideologies, practices, and procedures in our districts and schools.

APPENDIX A

SELF-STUDY JOURNAL PROMPTS

Journal Prompts

The following is a list of journal prompts I used to aid in critical self-reflection throughout the study

Describe the intervention and its significance to reducing out-of-school suspensions.

How are students, staff, parents, and/or leaders reacting to the intervention?

In response to the suspension and discipline referral data, what should I start, stop, and/or continue?

What should I start, stop, and/or continue in response to the interactions and conversations I have had with staff, students, parents, and leaders?

How do I feel about progress of the implementation of the intervention?

What additional supports and/or development do I need to successfully implement the intervention (reduce suspensions)?

What challenges and/or successes am I experiencing while implementing the intervention?

What are my interactions with the school leaders?

Are the school leaders onboard? Why or why not? What may be interfering with their belief and/or participation in this intervention?

What are concerns raised by students, staff, parents, and/or leaders? How am I responding or how should I respond?

What are my concerns about the progress of this intervention? Where do my concerns stem from?

What do I need to do to improve communications with school leaders, teachers, staff, students, and parents?

Are things going as expected? Why or why not? What is my response?

Did things go as expected? Why or why not? What is my response?

Throughout this process, what am I learning about myself and my leadership abilities?

What are some problems that still exist with suspensions? What are the root causes of those problems? How and when will I address them?

How was the professional development session that I lead today? What went well, and how do I know? What do I need to improve? What are my next steps?

APPENDIX B

CRITICAL FRIEND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Critical Friend Interview Questions

The following questions were used in a semi-structured interview style:

How has the intervention made a difference? What evidence do you have to support your stance?

What are your thoughts to the students', parents', staff's, and leaders' responses to the intervention?

How have you responded to conflict, resistance, or adversity? How have you responded to success?

Have you noticed any changes (good or bad) from the beginning of the year (pre-intervention) until now? What evidence do you have?

What have you learned about yourself throughout this process? What are you most proud of? What are your opportunities for growth?

In addressing out-of-school suspensions, how have your actions/reactions contributed to the success or lack thereof?

How has his process changed the way you think, act, and/or feel?

What further development do you need? Where and how could you seek it?

APPENDIX C

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS PROTOCOL

Document Analysis Protocol

The below data analysis protocol helped me to analyze documents (meeting agendas, notes, etc.) according to the Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework (CRSL; Khalifa et al., 2016).

Date	
Document Analyzed	
Description	

Behaviors of Culturally Responsive Leaders (Khalifa et al., 2016)			
Critical Self-Awareness			
Category	Present in doc?	Evidence	
Is committed to continuous learning of cultural knowledge and contexts			
Displays a critical consciousness on practice in and out of school; displays self-reflection			
Uses school data and indicators to measure CRSL			
Uses parent/community voices to measure cultural responsiveness in schools			
Challenges Whiteness and hegemonic epistemologies in school			

Leading with courage			
Is a transformative leader or social justice and inclusion			

APPENDIX D

APA (2008) ZERO TOLERANCE TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

APA (2008) Zero Tolerance Task Force Recommendations

A. Reforming Zero Tolerance Policies

A.1 Practice

- A.1.1 Apply zero tolerance policies with greater flexibility, taking context and the expertise of teachers and school administrators into account.
- A.1.2 Teachers and other professional staff who have regular contact with students on a personal level should be the first line of communication with parents and caregivers regarding disciplinary incidents.
- A.1.3 Define all infractions, whether major or minor, carefully, and train all staff in appropriate means of handling each infraction.
- A.1.4 Evaluate all school discipline or school violence prevention Strategies to ensure that all disciplinary interventions, programs, or strategies are truly impacting student behavior and school safety.

A.2. Policy

- A. 2.1 Reserve zero tolerance disciplinary removals for only the most serious and severe of disruptive behaviors.
- A.2.2 Replace one-size-fits all disciplinary strategies with graduated systems of discipline, wherein consequences are geared to the seriousness of the infraction.
- A.2.3 Require school police officers who work in schools to have training In adolescent development.

A.3 Research

- A.3.1 Develop more systematic prospective studies on outcomes for children who are suspended or expelled from school due to zero tolerance policies.
- A.3.2 Expand research on the connections between the education and juvenile justice system and in particular empirically test the support for an hypothesized school-to-prison pipeline.
- A.3.3 Conduct research at the national level on disproportionate minority exclusion, or the extent to which school districts' use of zero tolerance disproportionately targets youth of color, particularly African American males.
- A.3.4 Conduct research on disproportionate exclusion by disability status, specifically investigating the extent to which use of zero tolerance increases the disproportionate discipline of students with disabilities, and explore the extent to which differential rates of removal are due to intra-student factors versus systems factors.
- A.3.5. Conduct research to enhance understanding of the potential differential effects of zero tolerance policies by student gender.
- A.3.6 Conduct econometric studies or cost-benefit analyses designed to explore the relative benefits of school removal for school climate as compared to the cost to society of removal of disciplined students from school.

B. Alternatives to Zero Tolerance

B.1 Practice

- B.1.1 Implement preventive measures that can improve school climate and improve the sense of school community and belongingness.

- B.1.2 Seek to reconnect alienated youth and re-establish the school bond for students at-risk of discipline problems or violence. Use threat assessment procedures to identify the level of risk posed by student words.
- B.1.3 Develop a planned continuum of effective alternatives for those students whose behavior threatens the discipline or safety of the school.
- B.1.4 Improve collaboration and communication between schools, parents, law enforcement, juvenile justice and mental health professionals to develop an array of alternatives for challenging youth.
- B.2 Policy
 - B.2.1 Legislative initiatives should clarify that schools are encouraged to provide an array of disciplinary alternatives prior to school suspension and expulsion and, to the extent possible, increase resources to schools for implementing a broader range of alternatives, especially prevention.
 - B.2.2 Increase training for teachers in classroom behavior management and culturally-sensitive pedagogy.
 - B.2.3 Increase training for teachers, administrators, and other school personnel to address sensitivity related to issues of race.
 - B.2.4 Increase training on issues related to harassment and sexual harassment for teachers, administrators, and other school personnel.
- B.3 Research

- B.3.1 Conduct systematic efficacy research including quasi-experimental and randomized designs to compare academic and behavioral outcomes of programs with and without zero tolerance policies and practices.
- B.3.2 Increase attention to research regarding the implementation of alternatives to zero tolerance. What are the best and most logistically feasible ways to implement alternative programs in schools?
- B.3.3 Conduct outcome research focused on the effects and effectiveness of various approaches to school discipline, not only for schools, but also for families and the long-term functioning of children (pp. 857-859).

APPENDIX E

THE PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders

Standard 1: Mission, Vision, and Core Values

Effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of each student.

Standard 2: Ethics and Professional Norms

Effective educational leaders act ethically and according to professional norms to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness

Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 4: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Effective educational leaders develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 5: Community of Care and Support for Students

Effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of each student.

Standard 6: Professional Capacity of School Personnel

Effective educational leaders develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 7: Professional Community for Teachers and Staff

Effective educational leaders foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 8: Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community

Effective educational leaders engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 9: Operations and Management

Effective educational leaders manage school operations and resources to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

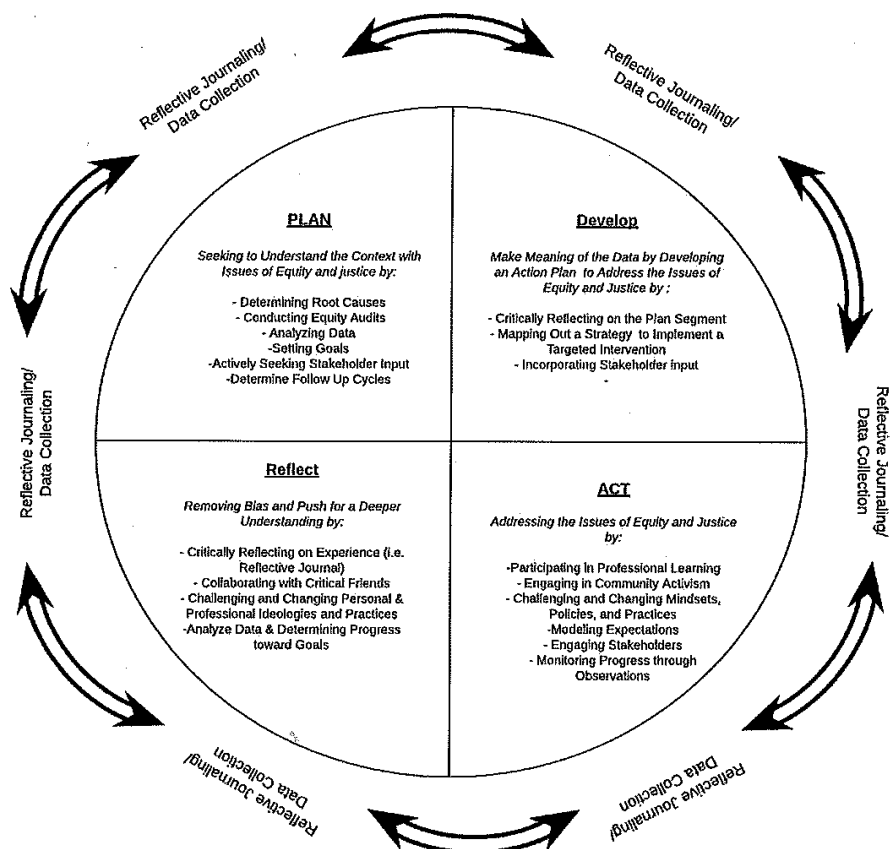
Standard 10: School Improvement

Effective educational leaders act as change agents of continuous improvement to promote each student's academic success and well-being (NPBEA, 2015, pp. 9-18).

APPENDIX F

THE FRAMEWORK FOR COURAGEOUS AND TRANSFORMATIONAL
EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

The Framework for Courageous and Transformative Educational Leaders



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VITA

Ernest Williams is a native of Chicago. As a product of Chicago Public Schools, Ernest graduated at the top of his senior class, with a 4.1 grade point average, a Golden Apple Scholarship, and multiple scholarships and awards for his academic achievement, community service, and leadership. Ernest earned a Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education, with a concentration in computer science from DePaul University in Chicago and a Master's in Educational Leadership from DePaul University.

Ernest has been in the field of education for 17 years. Ernest started his career in Chicago Public Schools as a teacher and eventually became a school administrator, serving as both an assistant principal and principal. In 2015, Ernest was recruited to work for an education management organization, where he provided professional development and leadership coaching to various schools across the nation. Ernest served as the superintendent of an Innovative Network School in the state of Indiana.

Ernest is a member and deacon at Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago. Ernest is a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Incorporated. In addition to participating in various community service and advocacy programs, Ernest has held various leadership positions and continues to serve as a mentor. Ernest loves to travel and spend time with his nephews.

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